

# The Protestants of Loudun: The Fragile Existence of a Religious Minority in Seventeenth-Century France (1598-1685)

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*This paper analyses the subtle changes that took place in the Reformed Protestant community of Loudun as a result of local and state persecution during the period of the Edict of Nantes (1598-1685). The reaction to persecution manifested itself not only in a growing reticence among Loudun's Protestants to broadcast their allegiance to their faith, but also an ability to maintain significant family patrimony and cohesive family compacts. Loudun's Protestant community became smaller and more marginalized. Yet there remained right up to the Revocation a committed core that had deep, resilient roots in the town. This paper's conclusions are based largely on a statistical analysis of notarial documents.*

*Cette recherche traite des changements subtils qui se font jour dans la communauté réformée de Loudun pendant la période de la persécution sous l'édit de Nantes. La réponse à cette persécution se manifeste dans la réticence croissante parmi ces protestants de proclamer leur allégeance à la foi réformée, mais aussi dans leur capacité de préserver leur important patrimoine familial et des réseaux familiaux solides. Cette communauté protestante s'est ainsi repliée et s'est trouvée marginalisée. Pourtant, il est resté jusqu'à la Révocation un noyau déterminé et fidèle qui s'est enraciné dans la ville. Les conclusions de ce travail reposent principalement sur une analyse statistique des minutes notariales.*

ONE CAN envision the grim, apprehensive expression that hung heavy on the faces of the last remnants of the Reformed Protestant community of the French town of Loudun, on that fateful day in October 1685. The air must have been

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thick with tension as they watched two companies of dragoons march into the town. Quite plausibly, Loudun's Protestants had heard of the destruction that such soldiers had inflicted on other local Protestant minorities across the kingdom. The pattern continued, for by the time the soldiers had left Loudun, the Reformed church and many of its civil and ecclesiastical records lay in ruins.<sup>1</sup> At that point, Loudun's Reformed community essentially broke apart, a rupture that forced many to accept conversion to Catholicism or flight to a Protestant haven outside France.

We are at the moment of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, when King Louis XIV rescinded legislation that for almost a century had granted the kingdom's Protestant minority some measure of civil and religious prerogatives within this predominantly Catholic kingdom. However, the Revocation and the devastation that it brought for French Protestant communities such as Loudun represent the culmination of a long history of state and local persecution that had been set in motion decades earlier.

How was this growing dislocation felt by the Protestant families in Loudun across the period of the Edict of Nantes? What were some of the subtle changes that took place among these families as a result? This article addresses these questions, focusing on the impact of persecution on the Reformed Protestant community of Loudun during the period of the Edict (from 1598 to 1685). The reaction to persecution manifested itself not only in a growing reluctance among Loudun's Protestants to exhibit their allegiance to the Reformed creed, but also a striking resolve to maintain significant family patrimony as well as the cohesiveness and solidity of a number of extended families. Even private ceremonies such as the preparation and signing of a marriage contract took on a new significance for this religious minority. Certainly, by the 1660s, the community had lost much of its numerical strength and local clout; yet there remained right up to the dragoons' arrival a concentrated, committed Protestant community that had deep, resilient roots in the town. The conclusions that emerge here are based on a collection of Protestant and Catholic notarial documents that date from 1598 to 1685, namely 936 marriage contracts and 416 testaments (although this paper's focus will be on the former).

A large body of literature exists on the national and local legislation that increasingly constrained the lives of French Protestant communities, particularly during the early decades of Louis XIV's reign.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, a number of

1 François-Jacques Dumoustier de La Fond, *Essais sur l'histoire de la ville de Loudun* (Poitiers: chez Michel-Vincent Chevrier, 1778), p. 150; Yves Krumenacker, *Les Protestants du Poitou au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (1681-1789)* (Paris: Champion, 1998), pp. 100-108; Élie Benoist, *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes, contenant les choses les plus remarquables qui se sont passées en France avant et après sa publication, à l'occasion de la diversité des Religions...* (Delft: Adrien Beman, 1693), tome III, p. 761; Sylvette Noyelle and Sylviane Rohaut, *Histoire des rues de Loudun: le bourg du Martray et le faubourg du Vieux-Cimetière* (Loudun: Société historique du Loudunais, 1999), p. 123; Jean-Antoine Arnault-Poirier, "Monuments de l'arrondissement de Loudun," *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest* [hereafter MSAO] (1846) [no volume number], pp. 146-148.

2 See, for example, some general studies: Elisabeth Labrousse, "Une foi, une loi, un roi?" *Essai sur la Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes* (Genève: Labor et Fides; Paris: Payot, 1985); Daniel Ligou, *Le Protestantisme*

historians have produced local studies of Protestant communities in the seventeenth century, set against the backdrop of this theme of mounting persecution. What is emerging from this historiography is not only a clearer vision of the impact of state and local persecution, but also an understanding of how those realities could differ from what was prescribed and ordered in legislation and how some Protestant families developed strategies to survive in a context that was growing increasingly hostile.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, other more specialized studies have added depth and sophistication to the topic. Philip Benedict mined baptismal registers to document changes in Protestant communities across France, describing how Huguenots gradually modified their seasonal rhythms for marriage and conception to align them more unobtrusively with Catholic practice and Catholic teachings. Raymond Mentzer has reconstructed the survival strategies developed by a Protestant family of the lesser nobility.<sup>4</sup> As a whole, this literature is well developed, but it needs local studies to shed light and add nuance to the broader patterns. This article seeks to be one such detailed, local case study.

### The Local and National Historical Contexts, 1598-1685

The notarial contracts examined in this study were drafted across the evolving period of the Edict of Nantes, a period that can be divided into three sub-periods: 1598 to 1635, 1636 to 1665, and 1666 to 1685. The three sub-periods are not equal in duration, but they represent three historically distinct units, following to some extent developments at the national level. The Crown moved from guarded sympathy for the Reformed minority, to neutralization of the military force of the Huguenot party in the 1620s, to relative indifference due to the distracting problems of international and civil turbulence and, then, in the quarter-century before the Revocation, a harsh interpretation of the Edict of Nantes accompanied by intensified state persecution under Louis XIV. One piece of legislation followed another, restricting Protestant worship and access to particular offices and

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*en France de 1598 à 1715* (Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1968); Didier Boisson and Hugues Daussy, *Les Protestants dans la France moderne* (Paris: Belin, 2006), especially pp. 205-220; Ruth Kleinman, "Changing Interpretations of the Edict of Nantes: The Administrative Aspect, 1643-1661," *French Historical Studies*, vol. 10, no. 4 (Summer 1978), pp. 541-571; Philip Benedict, *The Faith and Fortune of France's Huguenots, 1600-85* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001).

3 See, in particular, Catherine Rome, *Les Bourgeois protestants de Montauban au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: une élite urbaine face à une monarchie autoritaire* (Paris: Champion, 2002), especially pp. 11-29; Robert Sauzet, *Chroniques des frères ennemis. Catholiques et Protestants à Nîmes du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Caen: Paradigme, 1992), especially pp. 29-41, 75-83; Robert Pic, "Le protestantisme à Aubais, XVI<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* [hereafter *BSHPF*], vol. 140, no. 2 (April-June 1994), pp. 237-275; Céline Houzard, "La communauté protestante de Saint-Germain-des-Prés (1635-1640)," *BSHPF*, vol. 142, no. 3 (July-September 1996), pp. 389-440.

4 See Philip Benedict, *The Huguenot Population of France, 1600-1685: The Demographic Fate and Customs of a Religious Minority* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge, vol. 81, part 5, 1991), (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1991), pp. 91-95, 101-104; Raymond A. Mentzer, Jr., *Blood and Belief: Family Survival and Confessional Identity among the Provincial Huguenot Nobility* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1994), especially pp. 4-12, 25-26, 48-80, 184-193.

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professions, shutting down special Protestant appeal courts, closing Protestant educational institutions, and so on.<sup>5</sup>

Loudun's Reformed community entered the first sub-period in a position of strength, after four decades of consolidation. Admittedly, the town lay in the central-western part of France, outside the crescent of relative Huguenot strength that swept from the south of France up along the southwestern coast, far away from such Protestant strongholds as La Rochelle, Montauban, or Nîmes.<sup>6</sup> Yet, because it had been established as far back as the early 1560s, perhaps even in 1555,<sup>7</sup> Loudun's Reformed community fostered a healthy number of Huguenot families who established a vigilant church consistory and secured a foothold in Loudun's tax-collecting and judicial infrastructure. Also, because of these deeper roots, the Reformed community received a legal title to religious worship that was relatively unassailable: the Reformed temple, as it was called, could remain inside the city walls.<sup>8</sup> The new, larger temple that Loudun's Protestants had built by 1610 reflected that growing status.<sup>9</sup> Also, the Edict of Nantes designated the town and its commanding fortifications as one of the *places de sûreté* allotted by the Crown to the Huguenot party as a form of collateral to ensure continuance of the Edict. The governor and the garrison were thus Protestant, and many Huguenot assemblies and synods were held inside the town walls.<sup>10</sup>

5 Bernard Cottret, *1598 L'Édit de Nantes: pour en finir avec les guerres de religion* (Paris: Perrin, 1997), pp. 221-332; George A. Rothrock, *The Huguenots: A Biography of a Minority* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), pp. 124-174; Geoffrey Treasure, *Louis XIV* (Harlow, England and New York: Pearson Education, 2001), pp. 212-237; Boisson and Daussy, *Les Protestants dans la France moderne*, pp. 206-216.

6 See Krumnacker, *Les Protestants du Poitou*, pp. 15-23; Philip Conner, *Huguenot Heartland: Montauban and Southern French Calvinism during the Wars of Religion* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), especially pp. 15-53; Sauzet, *Chroniques des frères ennemis*, pp. 75-83; Kevin C. Robbins, *City on the Ocean Sea: La Rochelle, 1530-1650: Urban Society, Religion, and Politics on the French Atlantic Frontier* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997).

7 John Calvin sent the first Reformed minister to Loudun in 1555. In the Edict of Amboise (1563), King Charles IX of France acknowledged that Loudun was on a list of legalized French Reformed communities. See Archives municipales de Loudun [hereafter AML], AA 1, pièce 2bis (copy of original), "Lettres patentes issued by Charles IX permitting the free exercise of the Reformed religion in the town and faubourgs of Loudun," June 27, 1563; Noyelle and Rohaut, *Histoire des rues de Loudun: le bourg du Martray* p. 124; Dumoustier de La Fond, *Essais sur l'histoire de la ville de Loudun*, tome I, p. 32.

8 *L'Édit de Nantes (texte intégral en français moderne)*, eds. Danièle Thomas and Jean-Louis Bourgeon (Bézanos: Héracles, 1998), general articles 7-11, pp. 35-37; secret article 6, p. 62; also, less directly, general articles 12 and 13, p. 37.

9 Denis Vatinel, "Les protestants loudunais sous Henri IV," (conférence presented by pasteur Denis Vatinel for the Société Historique du Loudunais, Loudun, April 2, 1995), p. 18 (I am grateful to M<sup>me</sup> Sylviane Rohaut for having provided me with a transcription of the proceedings); Arnault-Poirier, "Monuments de l'arrondissement de Loudun," p. 146; Noyelle and Rohaut, *Histoire des rues de Loudun*, p. 122.

10 Bibliothèque nationale de France [hereafter BnF], Anciens Petits Fonds français, 20157, folios 192r-v, Louis Trincant, *Mémoire de la ville de Loudun*; Roger Drouault, ed., *Louis Trincant: abrégé des antiquités de Loudun et pais de Loudunois* (Loudun: Imprimerie A. Roiffé, 1894), pp. 24-25; François Le Proust, "De la ville et Chateau de Loudun du pays de Loudunais et des habitants de la ville et du pays," in Pierre Le Proust, *Commentaires sur les coutumes du pays de Loudunais ou se rapportent plusieurs coutumes d'autres pays...* (1<sup>re</sup> ed.) (Saumur: Thomas Portau, 1612), pp. 8-9; Archives nationales françaises [hereafter AN], TT 250, 36<sup>e</sup> pièce, *Estat des places et deniers ordonné par Sa Majesté à Nantes les 12, 14, 17 et 18 mai 1598*



Image 1: The Hospitaller church, used by the Protestants from about 1589 to 1610, until they constructed a new and much larger edifice. Photo: Edwin Bezzina, 2011.

By 1598, then, the community represented a sizeable, wealthy, and influential minority, hovering between 25% and 40% of a total local population that fluctuated between about 6,000 and 10,000 inhabitants (using the numbers of baptisms per annum as a gauge).<sup>11</sup> Although Loudun was not a *ville huguenote*, as some Catholic writers claimed,<sup>12</sup> it sometimes seemed like one. For example,

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*pour seureté et d'ostage à ceux de la Religion* (Montpellier: Jean Gillet, 1600), p. 5; *L'Édit de Nantes*, second brevet, pp. 75-78; Michel Carmona, *Les Diables de Loudun. Sorcellerie et politique sous Richelieu* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), pp. 48-49; Auguste-Louis Lcrosey, *Loudun. Histoire civile et religieuse* (Loudun: Librairie Blanchard, 1908; Marseille: Laffite Reprints, 1980), pp. 16-17; Vatinel, "Les protestants loudunais," p. 9; James S. Valone, *Huguenot Politics: 1601-1622* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994), pp. 137-150; V. L. Saulnier, "Henri IV, Odet de la Noue, et l'Assemblée de Loudun," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1965), pp. 536-538.

11 In the absence of census data, an approximate idea of the size of Loudun's population, and the Protestant percentage of it, is made possible by counting baptismal acts per annum and applying a multiplier of 25. The Protestant baptismal statistics were compiled from AML, GG 195-197, Lists of Protestant baptisms of the Reformed Church of Loudun (1566-1608, 1621-1663); Transcriptions of Jacques Moron, *Baptêmes protestants de Loudun du 14/02/1566 à Mai 1608* (édition du 23 août 1995); *Baptêmes protestants de Loudun 1621-1663* (édition du 6 juin 1995); *Baptêmes protestants de Loudun 1664-1685* (édition du 28 mai 1995). For the Catholic figures, we used the baptismal registers of the town's two Catholic parishes, AML, GG 5-10, 13, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22-24, 26, 182-190, 245. See also Benedict, *Huguenot Population of France*, pp. 32, 34-35, 120.

12 Archives départementales de la Vienne [hereafter ADV], D 128, "Arguments prepared by the syndic of the Jesuits of Poitiers against Théophraste Regnier, and others," 1658 [no precise date given]; Carmona, *Les Diables de Loudun*, p. 70; Alfred Barbier, ed., "Jean II d'Armagnac, Gouverneur de Loudun, et Urbain Grandier (1617-1635)," *MSAO*, 2<sup>e</sup> série, 8 (1885), p. 307.

commissioners dispatched to Loudun in 1611 to oversee application of the Edict received reports that during Catholic feast days Protestants conducted business openly and with impunity.<sup>13</sup> Loudun's Reformed community also withstood the sporadic outbursts of confessional violence and conflict that continued into this period of relative peace.

The scales began to tip in the later 1620s and 1630s. The town's Catholic population was growing by leaps and bounds because of what could be called "confessional Malthusianism": that is, when an epidemic annihilated a sizeable portion of the town's population, the Catholic community was able to replenish its numbers and expand further by tapping into its demographic reservoir in the surrounding Catholic countryside. The Protestant community of Loudun could not draw upon such reserves, because rural Protestant communities were disappearing in this part of the kingdom.<sup>14</sup> Protestant numerical strength in Loudun thus declined proportionately through these decades. Moreover, Catholic elites secured control of the town's *maréchaussée* (a local police force) as well as the two royal law courts, the *bailliage* and the *prévôté*.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, still wincing from some difficult siege campaigns during the Huguenot revolts of the early 1620s, the Crown decided to order the destruction of a large number of fortification systems inside the kingdom, those of Loudun included.<sup>16</sup> The Protestants of Loudun thus lost their *place de sûreté* and all the military power that it had once conferred.

13 In doing so, they were contravening the twentieth general article of the Edict. See *L'Édit de Nantes*, p. 39; AN, TT 250, pièce 49, "Articles contenant des plaintes des habitants catholiques de la ville de Loudun pour estre présentés à M.M. les commissaires députés pour l'exécution des édits (1611)," December 11, 1611. For more details on this commission, see Dumoustier de La Fond, *Essais sur l'histoire de la ville de Loudun*, tome I, p. 98.

14 Edwin Bezzina, "After the Wars of Religion: Protestant-Catholic Accommodation in the French Town of Loudun, 1598-1665" (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2004), pp. 119-131. Jean-Luc Tulot suggests such a hypothesis for the Protestants of Loudun, Châtellerauld, and Poitiers in "Les Églises réformées urbaines du Haut Poitou à la veille de la Révocation: Loudun, Châtellerauld et Poitiers," (unpublished draft), pp. 9-10. I am grateful to M. Tulot for having provided me with a copy of his work. See also Jean Filleau, *Décisions catholiques ou Recueil Général des Arrêts Rendus en toutes les Cours Souveraines de France en exécution, ou interprétation des Édits, qui concernent l'Exercice de la Religion Prét. Réformée...* (Poitiers: Jan Fleuriat, 1668), pp. 335-336, 349-350; Marcelle Gabrielle Formon, "Un évêque de la Contre-Réforme. La Rocheposay et le Diocèse de Poitiers 1612-1651," (Thèse pour le Doctorat d'Université soutenue devant la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Poitiers, 1951), pp. 274-276; André Benoist, "Catholiques et Protestants en 'Moyen-Poitou' jusqu'à la Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes (1534-1685)," *Bulletin de la Société historique et scientifique des Deux-Sèvres* 2<sup>e</sup> série, vol. 16, no. 2-3 (1983), pp. 341-342.

15 Bezzina, "After the Wars of Religion," pp. 75-88, 102-111.

16 See AML, AA3, 4<sup>e</sup> pièce, "Don made by King Louis XIII to Jean d'Armagnac and Michel Lucas, King's Secretary, of the materials remaining from the demolition of the *grand château* of Loudun," May 31, 1622; A. Lloyd Moote, *Louis XIII, The Just* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 126-127; Pierre Chevallier, *Louis XIII: roi cornélien* (Paris: Fayard, 1979), pp. 227-235; A. D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: The Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, trans. Brian Pearce (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 188. For a similar program in the Moyen-Poitou, see Benoist, "Catholiques et protestants en 'Moyen-Poitou'," pp. 273-274.



Image 2: La tour carrée (one of the remaining structures from Loudun's fortifications). Photo: Edwin Bezzina, 2011.

That process of marginalization accelerated with the arrival in the early 1630s of a royal commissary, Jean Martin de Laubardemont. He was ordered first to oversee demolition of the fortifications and then to preside over the Grandier Affair, the trial of a Catholic priest accused of bringing the Devil into Loudun's Ursuline convent, a relatively new religious order that focused on educating young girls. The commissary then transferred to the Ursulines the town's Protestant college, a venerable institution that had prepared male youth for further study in the academies and universities. Laubardemont also forbade Protestants from using of the town's cemetery, forcing them to purchase land on the outskirts of the city.<sup>17</sup> By 1636, the political shift in Loudun towards the Catholic

17 On the Grandier Affair, see Robert Rapley, *A Case of Witchcraft: The Trial of Urbain Grandier* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998); Carmona, *Les Diables de Loudun*; [Pierre] Aubin, *Histoire des Diables de Loudun ou De La Possession des Religieuses Ursulines et de la condamnation et du supplice d'Urbain Grandier Curé de la même ville* (Amsterdam: Abraham Wolfgang, 1693). On the issue of the Protestant college and the cemetery, see AN, TT 250, pièce 40, "Ordonnance de Monsieur de Laubardemont par laquelle a esté ordonné un cimetière nouveau à ceux de la Religion prét. R. de Loudun," December 22, 1633 (I am grateful to M. Gérard Jubert, former archivist at the Archives Nationales françaises, for having provided me with copies of these two documents); ADV, 2H5 94, "Factum pour montrer l'injustice et la violence que les Religieuses Ursulines de la ville de Loudun..." (undated document, but clearly written after February 9, 1652; thanks are extended to M<sup>me</sup> Noyelle for having provided me with a copy of this document); Benoist, *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes*, tome I, p. 232; *La Rebellion faite dans la ville de Loudun, par Messieurs de la Religion prétenduë Reformée contre les Catholiques...* (Bordeaux: Thomas Poinson, 1635); Keith P. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early-Modern France* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), pp. 115, 133.



Image 3: St. Pierre du Marché, the main Catholic parish church in Loudun (the church was built in the early thirteenth century, and was augmented and expanded in the following centuries). Photo: Edwin Bezzina, 2011.

community had run its course. Still, in the second sub-period (from 1636 to 1665), the Reformed community in Loudun did not atrophy. It was certainly smaller than it had been, but the central core remained resilient, buttressed by powerful mercantile families and a continued grip on the town's tax-collecting institutions.<sup>18</sup>

In the third sub-period, from 1666 to 1685, state and local religious persecution escalated. A militant Catholic faction in Loudun launched a number of legal challenges to the existence of the Reformed temple.<sup>19</sup> The temple survived until the dragoons came and tore it down around the time of the Revocation; by the 1680s, Loudun's Protestant community had shrunk to between 10 and 20% of the town's population. Individual ministers and laypeople also suffered serious legal harassment.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Bezzina, "After the Wars of Religion," pp. 192-223.

<sup>19</sup> Reformed Protestant churches were commonly referred to as temples. See Noyelle and Rohaut, *Histoire des rues de Loudun: le bourg du Martray*, p. 123; Edwin Bezzina, "Charity and Confessional Difference in Seventeenth-Century France: The *Maison de Charité* of Loudun, 1648-1685," *Confraternitas* (Society for Confraternity Studies), vol. 11, no. 2 (Fall 2000), pp. 17-21; Roger Drouault, *Recherches sur les Établissements hospitaliers du Loudunais* (Loudun: Impr. de Roiffé, 1895), pp. 73-82.

<sup>20</sup> Dumoustier de La Fond, *Essais sur l'histoire de la ville de Loudun*, tome I, pp. 147-149; Noyelle and Rohaut, *Histoire des rues de Loudun: le bourg du Martray*, pp. 122-129; Auguste Lièvre, *Histoire des protestants et des églises réformées du Poitou* (Paris: Grassart, Cherbuliez, 1858), tome II, pp. 81-82, 148; transcriptions of Jacques Moron, *Baptêmes protestants de Loudun 1664-1685*; AML, GG 20, 22-24, 26, 188-191, 196, 245, Baptismal registers of the two Catholic parishes of Loudun.



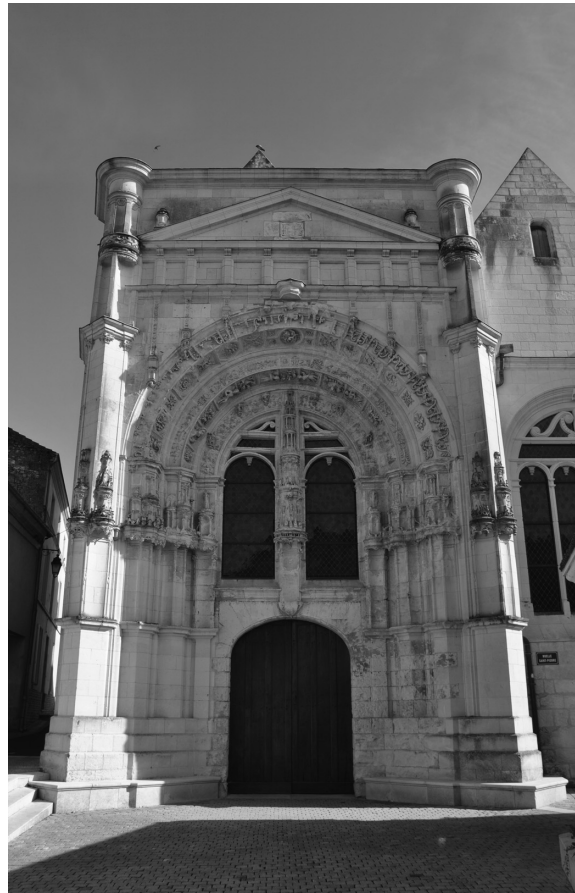


Image 4: St. Pierre du Marché, the main Catholic parish, showing its impressive Renaissance portal. Photo: Edwin Bezzina, 2011.

### **The Notarial Documentation**

Six main notaries were operating in Loudun from 1598 to 1685: three Protestants (Thomas Aubéry the Elder, Thomas Aubéry the Younger, and Jean Huger) and three Catholics (Aubin Douteau, René Douteau, and René Confex). There were a few others whose notarial documentation is incomplete. These notaries prepared contracts for clients of both denominations and attracted clients from every socio-professional stratum, despite some minor imbalances among those clienteles. Individuals of strong confessional convictions usually did not commission a notary of the opposite faith, although nothing legally prevented them from doing so.

Marriage contracts and testaments offer a window through which to observe the evolution of Loudun's Protestant community across the three sub-periods.

Marriage contracts, drafted usually before the marriage ceremony, were not absolutely necessary to validate a marriage, but notaries recommended them because there was much ambiguity and elasticity in state and customary law regarding marriage and the transfer of property.<sup>21</sup> The marriage contracts of elites tended to be more elaborate, certainly, but even agricultural workers, artisans, and domestic servants had such contracts drafted. After all, marriage contracts were intended to reinforce promises of marriage, acknowledge parental consent if required, outline the assets and parental bequests of the bride and groom, and encase the future wife's dowry in protective clauses. Such contracts formed a critical medium in family strategies, in establishing households and family alliances, and indeed in involving the broader kin group in those operations.<sup>22</sup> Although marriage contracts say little about the theological or ceremonial aspects of Protestant marriage, they offer clues about the socio-professional condition of these families, their geographic origin, and, to some degree, their wealth and influence.

The drafting of a marriage contract often took the form of a family ceremony, similar to the wedding although less ritualized and liturgical. It has parallels to a modern engagement party, although the seventeenth-century antecedent was typically presided over by a notary and his clerks, attended not only by the future bride and groom and their parents but often by an extensive array of family members and friends.<sup>23</sup> This fact emerges in stark relief once we compare for the first two sub-periods the signature averages for 687 marriage contracts with the signature averages for 171 sale contracts (of offices, property, etc.), 128 post-mortem inventories, and 161 testaments. The signature pages in the marriage contracts dwarf those of the three other types of notarial contracts, by a rough

21 Claude de Ferrière, *La Science Parfaite des notaires, ou le moyen de faire un parfait notaire....* (Paris: Charles Osmont, 1686), pp. 71-72. See also H. Michel, "Pratique Notariale et Société: les contrats de mariage à Montpellier à la veille de la Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes," in Société Savante d'Alsace et des Régions de l'est, *Les Actes notariés. Sources de l'histoire sociale XVI<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg (mars 1978)*, éd. Bernard Vogler (Strasbourg: Librairie Istra, 1979), pp. 163-164.

22 Julie Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy: Gender and the Politics of Household Authority in Early Modern France* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), pp. 60-74; Sébastien Jahan, *Profession, parenté, identité sociale. Les notaires de Poitiers aux temps modernes (1515-1815)* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1999), p. 135; Robert Wheaton, "Affinity and Descent in Seventeenth-Century Bordeaux," in Robert Wheaton and Tamara K. Hareven, eds., *Family and Sexuality in French History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), p. 118; Wendy Gibson, *Women in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 54.

23 Gregory Hanlon, *Confession and Community in Seventeenth-Century France: Catholic and Protestant Coexistence in Aquitaine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 105; Jean Gaudemet, *Le mariage en Occident: les mœurs et le droit* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987), pp. 364-365; Jean-Claude Bologne, *Histoire du mariage en Occident* (Paris: Pluriel, 1995), pp. 254-259; Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, "Le monopole de l'Église contesté," in Melchior-Bonnet and Catherine Salles, dirs., *Histoire du Mariage* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2009), pp. 500-503; Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy*, pp. 60-61. A few of Loudun's marriage contracts were drafted after the celebration of the marriage. One can cite here the example of the contract for Pierre Thibault and Marie Roulet. In this particular case, one wonders if this departure from standard procedure was the result in some way of the fact that this was a mixed marriage, one of the few to be contracted in Loudun. See ADV, 4 E 53:453, "Marriage contract: Pierre Thibault/Marie Roulet," April 9, 1615, Minutier Paul Proust.

ratio of 3 to 1: marriage contracts (an average of 16 signatures per contract), sale contracts (4 signatures per contract), post-mortem inventories (5), and testaments (3). The figures are generally consistent across the two sub-periods. Having more than ten witnesses sign a marriage contract does not strengthen its legal validity; arguably, in terms of the transfer of property between family members, a post-mortem inventory is just as important as a marriage contract. Furthermore, the ceremonial aspect of the preparation of marriage contracts emerges clearly when we examine the site in which the marriage contract was drafted. Although a group of at least 150 contracts examined in this article were modest affairs drafted in the notary's study, at least 430 contracts were prepared either in the home of the bride or one of her relatives, or, in the case of domestic servants, in the home of the master for whom the bride worked.<sup>24</sup> For many, the drafting of the marriage contract represented a social ceremony.

Of the 936 marriage contracts that form the basis of this article, 292 are for Protestant marriages and 629 are for Catholic marriages, while 15 are confessionally unidentifiable. The Catholic contracts are included in the data set because the distinct elements of the Protestant marriage contracts only appear in clear relief when they are juxtaposed with Catholic practice.<sup>25</sup>

Being fewer in number, Loudun's testaments do not offer the same possibilities as do the marriage contracts: we have 416 testaments, 93 of which are Protestant, 296 Catholic, and 27 unclear about their faith.<sup>26</sup> Testaments

24 See, for example, ADV, 4 E 53:61, "Marriage contract: Louis Aubry/Marie Amonnet," November 20, 1640, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder. The preference for the bride's domicile may be the result, perhaps, of the greater geographic mobility of the grooms in our data set and the greater tendency of the brides to hail from families firmly anchored in Loudun, a characteristic that is discussed below.

25 I determined the confessional configuration of each marriage contract by the stipulation of the church in which the marriage would be celebrated, a subject that is discussed below. A good number of the contracts are unclear about this stipulation; in most of these cases, I resolved the ambiguity by tracking the future couple in the Catholic and Protestant baptismal registers. There still remain 15 of the 936 contracts in which the confession of the contract could not be determined at this point. Needless to say, probably a majority of the marriage contracts drafted in the seventeenth century never survived to inform posterity, but it can be argued that this data set of 936 contracts stands as a statistically reliable sample because the baptismal registers for the Protestant and Catholic churches in Loudun contain about 11,200 couples. See Pat Hudson, *History by Numbers: An Introduction to Quantitative Approaches* (London: Arnold, 2000), p. 10; Konrad Hugo Jarausch, *Quantitative Methods for Historians: A Guide to Research, Data, and Statistics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 68-74; Loren Haskins and Kirk Jeffrey, *Understanding Quantitative History* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 121-166.

26 The number of available testaments for Loudun compares favourably with other studies, for example that of Pierre Chaunu (8,244 testaments for Paris for the years 1550 to An XIII). See Pierre Chaunu, *La Mort à Paris: 16<sup>e</sup>, 17<sup>e</sup>, 18<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1978), pp. 224-225; Ann W. Ramsey, *Liturgy, Politics, and Salvation: The Catholic League in Paris and the Nature of Catholic Reform, 1540-1630* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1999), p. 2; Alain G. Arthur, "Rural Faith and Wills as Evidence of Popular Religion in France, 1500-1650," *Historical Papers* (Canadian Historical Association) (1983), pp. 114, 134; Catherine Marle, "Le salut par les messes. Les Valenciennes devant la mort à la fin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue du Nord*, vol. 79, no. 1 (1997), p. 46; Serge Briffaud, "La famille, le notaire et le mourant: testament et mentalités dans la région de Luchon (1650-1790)," *Annales du Midi*, vol. 97, no. 172 (October-December 1985), p. 439; Valérie Lafage, "Les Notables devant la mort à Montpellier au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Annales du Midi*, vol. 110, no. 224 (1998), p. 439, and "Punir, récompenser: l'enseignement des testaments (1554-1622)," *Seizième Siècle*, no. 3 (2007), pp. 225-226. The most influential study for the south of France is Michel Vovelle, *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (nouv. éd.), (Paris: Éditions du CTHS, 1997).

are less abundant for Loudun than marriage contracts, perhaps because in this part of France the testament carried much less power to shape a patrimony to the testator's wishes than in other regions, notably in southern France.<sup>27</sup> Still, arguably more than any other notarial document, the testament takes us very close to the mentalities of the testator, or at least the testator's arrangement of priorities and balancing of religious convictions with other, more mundane concerns. Among Protestants, religious attitudes were expressed in the bequests left to the Reformed Church or to other parties, but also in the type of sepulchre indications requested in the testament, indications often infused with distinctly Protestant attitudes about death, burial, and the Afterlife.

How representative are these contracts of the socio-professional distribution in Loudun? The socio-professional distribution of the parties mentioned in the contracts is a factor that forms part of this analysis. Figure 1 outlines the socio-professional status of the grooms in the 936 marriage contracts. Echoing several relevant studies,<sup>28</sup> this analysis used the following socio-professional categories (a division that albeit is not perfectly linear):

- the first level of office-holders (judges in the two royal law courts and in the tax-collecting institutions and bureaux);
- the second level of office-holders (primarily university-trained lawyers, as well as other important personnel in Loudun's judicial and financial institutions);
- the third level of office-holders (notaries, *procureurs* and *greffiers*, who exercised important legal functions but did not undergo university training);<sup>29</sup>
- the fourth level of office-holders (lower-level office-holders such as *sergents royaux* and *huissiers* who delivered court summonses and performed other such tasks);
- medical doctors and principals of Loudun's *collèges*;
- apothecaries and barber-surgeons;

27 Le Proust, *Commentaires sur les coutumes du pays de Loudunais*, pp. 433-482, especially pp. 433-434.

28 See, for example, Annik Pardailhé-Galabrun, *La Naissance de l'Intime: 3 000 foyers parisiens XVII<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988), pp. 50-71. For a model based on a theoretical understanding offered in the early seventeenth century, see Roland Mousnier, *Les institutions de la France sous la monarchie absolue* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1980), tome I, pp. 6-44, 112-279; Roland Mousnier, *La Stratification Sociale à Paris aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles. L'échantillon de 1634, 1635, 1636* (Paris: Éditions A. Pedone, 1975), pp. 25-66. For the Marxist idea of a society of classes, see Boris Porshnev, *Les soulèvements populaires en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1972), pp. 365-392. Also see William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 6-9; J. Michael Hayden, "Models, Mousnier and *qualité*: The Social Structure of Early Modern France," *French History*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1996), pp. 375-398.

29 A *procureur* was a legal official who obtained his training as an apprentice with another *procureur*; *procureurs* were similar to English barristers and different from lawyers, who were university-educated and had much greater legal expertise and authority. A *greffier* served as a scribe and record keeper in the law courts or other administrative and financial institutions (Lachiver, *Dictionnaire du monde rural*, s.v. "procureur," p. 1064, s.v. "greffier," p. 694).

- the amorphous category of *sieur de*, a category that denotes those men who had a title (often connected to a village or a piece of land), except that their profession (if they had one) could not be pinpointed in any document that we consulted;<sup>30</sup>
- merchants;<sup>31</sup>
- artisans;<sup>32</sup>
- land-owning farmers;
- other agricultural workers such as sharecroppers and day workers;
- soldiers;
- domestic servants;
- clerics.

Figure 1 thus shows the social stratification apparent in the marriage contracts, specifically the socio-professional designation of the groom. All the socio-professional categories listed above are represented except clerics and the first level of office-holders. Although the status of some individuals could not be determined, overall the data reflect approximately the socio-professional stratification of Catholic and Protestant fathers found in the baptismal registers. The socio-professional data for the fathers of the brides are remarkably similar to the data in Figure 1, with some slight but inconsequential variations.<sup>33</sup> The socio-professional distribution of the testators (or their husbands in the case of female testators) exhibits a similar pattern, except for a slight variation in the percentage

30 Nicolas Moussault sieur du Fresne is a good example. In the 45 records that I have on Moussault in the database, only two provide any professional data: for example, a baptismal act in which he is noted as “commis au greffe en la mareschaussée de Loudun.” However, these posts were temporary, not permanent professions (AML, GG 8, Baptismal registers of the parish St. Pierre du Marché, “Baptismal act of Jehan Chevallier,” January 31, 1614). One other possibility is that men of this socio-professional designation formed part of that curious group of less gainfully employed individuals known as *rentiers*, who lived off the *rentes* of a considerable amount of family patrimony. See Marcel Lachiver, *Dictionnaire du monde rural: les mots du passé* (2<sup>e</sup> éd.) (Paris: Fayard, 2006), s.v. “rentier,” p. 1123.

31 Merchants are a separate group on their own, although there is variation among them (some of the cloth merchants could be quite wealthy).

32 In the category of artisans, we included together all the different types: those who belonged to a guild, those who did not, those who played a special role in that guild (as *maîtres jurés*), those who carried the designation of merchant-artisan (e.g. *marchand tisserand*), and artisans pure and simple. Although Loudun’s documentation is rarely consistent in the recording of these additional qualifiers to describe artisans, all individuals here still belong in this category because they are all essentially artisans. See Georges Duby, dir., *Histoire de la France urbaine*, tome III, Roger Chartier et al., *La ville des temps modernes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998), p. 203; Paul Raymond, *Dictionnaire des vieux métiers: 1 200 métiers disparus ou oubliés* (Paris: Brocceliande, 1994), s.v. “marchand,” p. 44; Bernard Chevalier, *Les bonnes villes de France, l’État et la société dans la France à la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Orléans: Paradigme, 1995), pp. 76-83.

33 The distribution of Catholic and Protestant fathers is outlined for the period from 1598 to 1665 in Bezzina, “After the Wars of Religion,” pp. 132-138, 192-209. Those pages and their graphs show the socio-professional status of 2,414 Protestant and Catholic fathers. Comparing this socio-professional distribution with that shown in Figure 1, we find that the variations between the two studies for each category are not more than 5%. Of course, there are confessional differences in the data that do not appear in Figure 1. For example, Catholic grooms are more heavily represented in the artisanal category; Protestant grooms virtually without exception were not involved in agriculture, not even as land-owning farmers.

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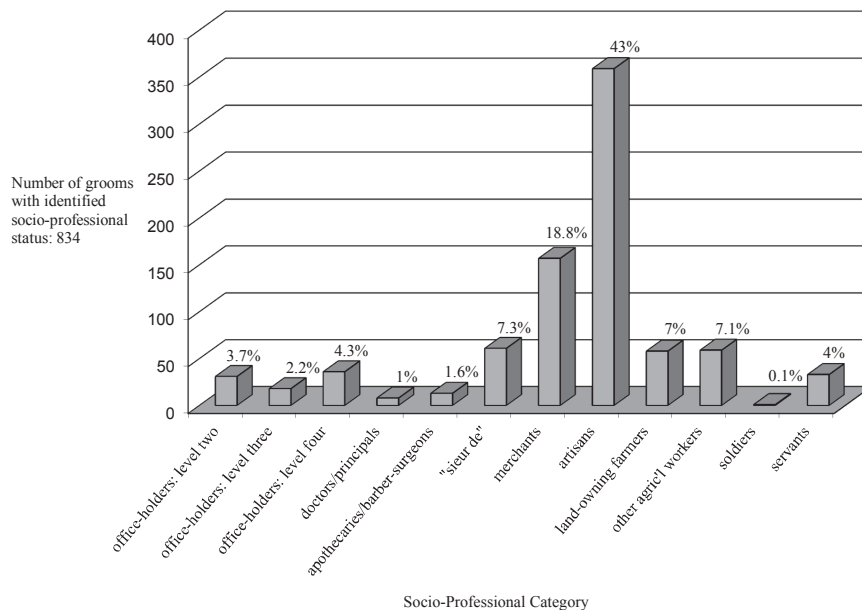


Figure 1: Socio-Professional Distribution of the Future Grooms, Catholic and Protestant (1598-1685) Marriage Contract Data Set.

Source: ADV, 4 E 1 92, 260-2, 264-71; 4 E 53: 37-125, 175-8, 260-282, 304-328, 394-405; 4 E 55:43-58; E 2: 352; E n 1489; J 1003.

for artisans.<sup>34</sup> Overall, in both sets of contracts, the cross-section reflects the broader socio-professional configuration of the town, an important observation because it provides assurance that the data in the two sets of notarial contracts are not skewed by socio-professional status. Our data analysis would rest on a weak foundation if, say, merchants were disproportionately represented in the contracts as status and wealth can affect decisions concerning religious behaviour.

### Specifying Confessional Allegiance and Sentiment in the Marriage Contracts: Language and Terminology

Indicating the confession in which the marriage would be celebrated was a matter of great importance to many families in Loudun, so much so that they embedded a clause to this effect in their marriage contracts (which, after all, were secular documents). Although Protestants did not consider marriage to be a sacrament as did their Catholic counterparts, the marriage still had to be celebrated inside a church. Such a stipulation, in fact, formed that part of the contract that dealt with parental consent, the authorization of the marriage, and the promise of marriage.

<sup>34</sup> In the testaments data set, artisans represent 34.5% of the identifiable testators/spouses; in the marriage contracts, the percentage for artisans is higher (43%).

The parties and their kin had to agree on the marriage of the two future spouses and assent to the confession in which the marriage would be celebrated. The identification in the contract of the church in which the couple would be married was in all likelihood a response to the repression of clandestine marriages, the logic being that marriages could not be clandestine if they took place in a church.<sup>35</sup> Such details in a contract might seem minor but they reveal broader fears and attitudes, not only among the notaries who drafted the contracts but also among the families who commissioned them.

Such religious details were also important because religion and religious choice were so intricately connected to social life. In the context of early modern France, religion can be seen as an intrinsic part of a person's reputation and sense of personal honour, especially in an urban environment such as Loudun where people lived closely together. Examining the centrality of personal honour in the context of urban protest, William Beik writes,

Forms of address, preferential treatment or the lack of it, styles of conduct, manners, clothing, all bestowed a stream of small satisfactions or aggravations on persons pursuing their daily affairs. As a result of this exchange of esteem, individuals surrounded themselves with a protective sense of self. This "face" was tied to an envelope of personal space that represented the zone of honor to be respected.<sup>36</sup>

We can apply Beik's observation to confessional language. An insult to one's creed, perhaps the most important element in that sense of self, could not be taken lightly. Such insults offended the civic ideals that many French men and women strove to emulate, be it *l'honnête homme* or the virtuous housewife and mother.<sup>37</sup>

The following typical stipulation in a marriage contract expresses these considerations lucidly: "As soon as it is mutually convenient, the parties promise to become husband and wife and to have their marriage celebrated in the church of the supposedly Reformed Religion, which they profess, abiding by the usual ceremonies and solemnities."<sup>38</sup> What interest us here are the terms used to describe

35 See Jean Imbert, "Les témoins au mariage du Concile de Trente à 1792, en France," in Roland Ganghofer, dir., *Le Droit de la famille en Europe, son évolution depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'à nos jours: actes des Journées internationales d'histoire du droit* (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 1992), pp. 307-313; Sarah Hanley, "Family and State in Early Modern France: The Marriage Pact," in Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert, eds., *Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World, 1500 to the Present* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 56-57.

36 William Beik, *Urban Protest in Seventeenth-Century France: The Culture of Retribution* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 29.

37 Jean-Pierre Dens, *L'Honnête homme et la critique du goût: esthétique et société au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1981), pp. 25-37; Elisja Schulte van Kessel, "Virgins and Mothers between Heaven and Earth," in Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge, eds., *A History of Women in the West*, vol. III: *Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes* (Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 132-166.

38 ADV, 4 E 53:121, "Marriage contract: Lametz Thibault/Marie Minyer," April 3, 1680, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger.

each confession. As we shall see, there were guidelines and laws that decreed how specifically each of the two Christian denominations had to be indicated in legal documents. In reality, however, the notaries and their clients used a much broader range of terms, which contain positive and negative connotations. These deviations from the prescribed norm take us to expressions of religious sentiment, to the characterizations of the other confession, and even to changing Protestant sentiments.

In state law and notarial practice, the term for Catholicism had solidified as "l'église catholique apostolique et romaine."<sup>39</sup> A notary (or client) could show exceptional devotion to the Catholic faith by using the term "notre mère sainte église catholique apostolique et romaine." That choice would accentuate the maternal, compassionate quality that Catholicism was believed to embody, in the same way that Bernini's two circular sets of colonnades at St. Peter's in Rome suggest the all-embracing arms of a Mother Church, welcoming Catholics and anyone of any denomination willing to approach her.<sup>40</sup> The dominant note in these terms, however, lay in the purity of the Catholic Church, in that it was universal and apostolic, the pure church as intended and conceived by the Apostles. In the published conversion literature of the time, the *nouveaux-convertis* were expected to refer to the Catholic Church as "one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church," revering "Our Holy Mother Church, to which alone belongs the ability to truly judge and interpret Holy Scripture."<sup>41</sup>

A notary or client of strong Protestant convictions certainly would not adopt such maternal overtones and metaphors when referring to the Catholic Church, perhaps because the Reformed tradition emphasized the masculine elements of divinity and somewhat decentred such feminine Catholic aspects as the veneration of the Virgin Mary.<sup>42</sup> If a Protestant notary wanted to show exceptional disdain and audacity, and if he felt that he could do so with impunity, he would remove the words "apostolique" and even "catholique," leaving the humiliating rump: "l'église romaine." This was tantamount to saying that Catholics were "papists," slavish followers of the pope in Rome, not the true Church. There was also a hint of Gallican indignation in this depiction, a resentment that rejected the papacy's claim to authority over the Gallican Church. Consider the writings

39 This is the way it is referenced in the Edict of Nantes, specifically in those articles that sought to re-establish Catholicism in France where it had been undermined by an aggressive Protestant presence. See *L'Édit de Nantes*, general article 3, 18, 20, 84, pp. 34, 39, 56; Cottret, *1598 L'Édit de Nantes*, pp. 176-181; Marc Venard, "L'Église catholique bénéficiaire de l'édit de Nantes: le témoignage des visites épiscopales," in Michel Grandjean and Bernard Roussel, eds., *Coexister dans l'intolérance. L'Édit de Nantes (1598)*, BSHPF, vol. 144, nos. 1-2 (special issue, January-June 1998), pp. 283-302.

40 See Charles Scribner III, *Gianlorenzo Bernini* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), p. 98.

41 Bibliothèque municipale d'Anger, H 3566 16, *Ritus Absolvendi ab haeresi*, pp. 4-5, quoted in Jacques Moron, *Protestants. Abjurations et divers* (édition du 11/9/1995). See also *L'Heureuse Conversion de noble homme Benoist Berault, Escuyer sieur de Fraisme, premier Pair de La Rochelle, et premier Trésorier des deniers de la ville: de Jacques Blamont, Escuyer sieur De la Faye*,... (Paris: chez Pierre Ramier, 1623), p. 10.

42 Thomas O'Meara, *Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, [1966]), pp. 125-145; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 153-163.



of Élie Benoist, the historiographer of the French Reformed Church who fled to safety in the Netherlands. In his seminal work, he used the words “l’église romaine” when mentioning the Catholic Church, usually in a negative context.<sup>43</sup> These confessionally inflammatory terms also appeared in a debate on Catholic-Protestant belief and practice between two confessional pillars of the Catholic and Protestant communities of Loudun: the Catholic lawyer Marc Antoine Naudin and the Reformed minister Jacques de Brissac.<sup>44</sup>

When characterizing their beliefs, French Protestants in legal documents would never willingly use the term “Calvinist” or “Huguenot,” because during this period such terms carried negative connotations: they denoted a personality cult, clandestinity, or rebellion against duly constituted authority. Protestants wanted to avoid terms that suggested that they were drifting away from the original Christian conception of the pure apostolic church.<sup>45</sup> The preferred term was the “Reformed religion,” signifying that French Protestantism did not break away from Christianity to create a new religion, but had purged the Catholic Church of the errors that it had allegedly accumulated through the centuries. Again, the accent is on purity, on following the example of the Apostles and resuscitating the original idea of the apostolic church. Hence, as we shall see, in the Protestant marriage contracts Protestant notaries and their clients preferred the terms “église réformée,” “sainte église réformée,” “église de Dieu réformée” or simply “église de Dieu.”<sup>46</sup> The latter two terms carry a whisper of the Reformed doctrine

43 Benoist, *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes*, for example, tome I, pp. 98, 228, 238, 412, 428, 460; tome II, pp. 7, 161, 193; 271, 330, 475, 515, 593; tome III, p. 133. See also Hubert Bost, “Élie Benoist et l'historiographie de l'édit de Nantes,” in Grandjean et Roussel, eds., *Coexister dans l'intolérance*, p. 372.

44 Marc Antoine Naudin, *Lettre de M.A. Naudin Avocat en parlement à Monsieur Des Loges, Ministre à Loudun sur son changement de religion. Avec la réponse dudit Sr Des Loges où sont traitées les principales controverses* (Saumur: Jehan Lesnicr, 1651), pp. 7, 9; Jacques de Brissac, *Reponse à la Lettre de Mr A. Naudin advocat en parlement, demeurant à Loudun, sur son changement de Religion...* (Saumur: Jean Lesnicr, 1651), pp. 8, 20, 22-24, 51.

45 See Benoist, *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes*, tome I, pp. 23-25, 311-2, 411, tome II, p. 590; Janet Gray, “The Origin of the Word Huguenot,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1983), pp. 349-359; Charles H. Parker, “French Calvinists as the Children of Israel: An Old Testament Self-Consciousness in Jean Crespin's *Histoire des Martyrs* before the Wars of Religion,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Summer 1993), pp. 231-238. It should be noted that the term “Huguenot” has since then shed its negative connotations and is used heavily in modern historiography and by the historical societies that deal with the French Protestant diaspora after 1685. For example, see Irene Scouloudi, ed., *Huguenots in Britain and their French Background, 1550-1800: Contributions to the Historical Conference of the Huguenot Society of London, 24-25 September 1985* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1985).

46 The last term would seem to convey a degree of uncertainty: to which confession does the “église de Dieu” refer? The term is used in 68 marriage contracts in our data set, all but five of them passed by Protestant notaries. Reference to the Catholic and Protestant baptismal registers and other documents helps to determine the precise confessional configuration of these contracts. For the vast majority of these 68 contracts, the future couples can be described as Protestant in that they came from Protestant households and they baptized their children in the Reformed confession. See also Benoist, *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes*, tome I, préface générale, [pp. 32-3]. See also Gabriel Audisio, “Se marier en Luberon: catholiques et protestants vers 1630,” *Histoire sociale, sensibilités collectives et mentalités. Mélanges Robert Mandrou* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985), p. 234.

of predestination, in that French Protestants felt that they were the elected members of God's church, the church of the children of Israel.

As early as 1598, however, the Crown required legal documentation involving the Protestant minority to refer to that religion as the "religion prétendue réformée," meaning "the supposedly Reformed Religion."<sup>47</sup> The French government and the Gallican Church perhaps could not do otherwise; accepting the term "Reformed religion" admitted that Catholicism should be reformed in the way that French Protestants envisioned. The early modern usage of the word "prétendue" carries a variety of meanings, almost all of which contain a sense of imposture.<sup>48</sup> The adverb "prétendue" implied that the Reformed creed was only a "so-called" or "supposedly" reformed religion. Either interpretation hints that the new denomination's novelties deceived its followers into thinking that they were going back to the apostolic church, but in fact were only engaging in error. Protestant notaries and Protestants in general chafed at the use of the modifier "prétendue" to characterize their creed. The word was undoubtedly less inflammatory than others used in more polemical types of documents,<sup>49</sup> but the French Protestant minority repeatedly protested to the King about the required use of the word in legal documents. This vocabulary remained a stubborn bone of contention in the delicate negotiations between the Crown and the Protestant minority.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, in Loudun in 1611, one of the complaints that the Catholics lodged against their confessional enemies was the Protestant refusal to use the contentious word "prétendue" in legal documents.<sup>51</sup>

Arguably, derogatory language could have greater ramifications for the French Protestant minority (compared to the safer Catholic majority). Such a legal designation involving the word "prétendue" carried the potential to metamorphose into the word "hérétique," an even more grievous term that was used often by some Catholics to typify the Protestant minority.<sup>52</sup> France's Protestant

47 See Cottret, *1598 L'Édit de Nantes*, pp. 86-88, 168.

48 Edmond Eugène Auguste Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1925-1967), tome VI, p. 174. See also Benoist, *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes*, tome II, pp. 91-92.

49 Even if many contemporary Catholic sources used the word "hérétiques" to refer to French Protestants, Catholic writers by law could not call French Protestants "heretics," because that would imply that the king was failing to fulfil his coronation oath to extirpate heresy in his kingdom. At the Conference of Loudun of 1616, the Crown had agreed not to include French Protestants as part of this group meriting royal censure. On the issue of the king's coronation oath, see the "Déclaration concernant le serment du sacre, 22 May 1616," quoted in Louis Firmin Hervé Bouchitté, éd., *Négociations, lettres et pièces relatives à la Conférence de Loudun* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1862), pp. 784-786; Carmona, *Diablos de Loudun*, pp. 68-69.

50 Benoist, *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes*, tome I, p. 411; tome II, pp. 62, 90-91, 176-7, 573, 590; Valonc, *Huguenot Politics*, pp. 96, 121, 138.

51 Bibliothèque de la Société du protestantisme français, Ms. 869 (I), "Articles contenant des plaintes des habitants catholiques de la ville de Loudun pour estre présentés à M.M. les commissaires députés pour l'exécution des édits" (1611); Luria, *Sacred Boundaries*, pp. 30-31; Lièvre, *Histoire des protestants et des églises réformées du Poitou*, tome I, pp. 280-281.

52 See, for example, ADV, D 128, "Arguments prepared by the sindic of the Jesuits of Poitiers against Théophraste Regnier, and others," 1658 [no precise date given], inventaire: marginalia; ADV 1 H 18:17, "Documentation for the litigation between the Carmelites of Loudun and Charles Rousseau" [no precise date given; certainly after 1659].

minority always feared the possibility of the adoption of the term “hérétique” by the Crown. As the king was obliged by his coronation oath to extirpate heresy from the kingdom, the formal adoption of this term for labelling French Protestants could open the door to serious infringements of their civil liberties, a vulnerability that could strip them of access to public office or education and even expose them to the same visceral persecution that the Valois monarchs had launched in the sixteenth century.<sup>53</sup>

The marriage contracts constitute one arena where these confessional terms were contested, and the choice of terms mattered to the notary’s clients just as much as to the notary himself. Each contract reflects the imperatives and beliefs of the clients as well as those of the notary. The choice of terms reflects in varying degrees their collective confessional sentiments. We apply here Serge Briffaud’s characterization of the public notary as a “maître de cérémonie”:<sup>54</sup> he guided and advised his clients in the fine points of legal detail, but he nevertheless incorporated his clients’ personal wishes and stipulations into the contract. The contracts were drafted by the notary, but they bear the stamp and input of his clients. The choice of terms was not the notary’s alone, reflecting only his confessional choices.<sup>55</sup> The notary drafted the contract in the presence of those involved, read it to them word for word, made any necessary corrections, asked them to sign it, and then instructed his clerk to draft copies and give them to the two client families. As a result, the contract’s content and nomenclature largely expressed an understanding, a collaboration between notary and clients. If it were otherwise, we would see uniformity of such church terms and language across the marriage contracts for each notary, but this is clearly not the case. Consider, for example, the marriage contracts of a bold Protestant notary, Thomas Aubéry the Elder: in his 338 contracts, outlined in Table 1, he used 15 different ways of referring to the two confessions, ranging from the triumphant to the derogatory.

Looking closely at how notaries referred to the church in the entire set of 936 contracts discloses details not only about how clients and notaries labelled the Protestant and Catholic faith, but also about how increasingly fearful Loudun’s Protestants became as the Revocation approached. Consider again the data from

53 Benoist often describes the struggle by the French Protestant minority over the word “hérétique”; see *Histoire de l’Édit de Nantes*, tome II, pp. 145, 161, 187, 249, 363-364. On the persecution of the Protestant minority under Kings François I<sup>er</sup> and Henri II, see Boisson and Daussy, *Les protestants dans la France moderne*, pp. 37-41, 62-70.

54 Here Briffaud is discussing the drafting of testaments, but the analogy can be applied to the drafting of marriage contracts as well. See Serge Briffaud, “Le temps de la source: testament et méthodologie en histoire des mentalités,” *Sources. Travaux historiques*, vol. 11 (1987), pp. 20-21.

55 The one exception lies in the contracts for Catholic servants, whose church is disdainfully referred to in the document as “l’église romaine.” In all likelihood, this designation resulted not only from the Protestant notary’s personal sentiments but also from those of the servant’s master, for in these cases the Catholic servant worked in a Protestant household whose master arranged and oversaw the preparation of the contract. Take, for example, the following two contracts: ADV, 4 E 53:82, “Marriage contract: Paul L’Honneur/Marie Sabion,” May 8, 1661, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder; and 4 E 1:264, “Marriage contract: Vincent Lecompte/Simone Saulnier,” May 16, 1613, Minutier M. Aubéry. In both these cases, as with others, the bride worked as a domestic servant of a Protestant master.

Table 1: Stipulations of the Denomination in which the Marriage will be Celebrated (the Marriage Contracts of Thomas Aubéry the Elder, Protestant notary, 1617-1669)

Denomination	#	% of his total by clients' confession	% of his total # of contracts
<u>Catholic stipulation</u>			
notre mère sainte église catholique apostolique et romaine	2	1.0%	0.6%
notre mère sainte église sainte église catholique apostolique et romaine	1	0.5%	0.3%
église de Dieu catholique apostolique et romaine	1	0.5%	0.3%
église catholique	4	2.0%	1.2%
église catholique apostolique et romaine	97	49.0%	28.7%
<b>église catholique romaine</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>40.9%</b>	<b>24.0%</b>
église romaine	5	2.5%	1.5%
Total	192*		
<u>Protestant stipulation</u>			
<b>église de Dieu réformée</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>48.5%</b>	<b>19.2%</b>
sainte église de Dieu	1	0.7%	0.3%
église de Dieu	34	25.4%	10.1%
sainte église réformée	5	3.7%	1.5%
église réformée	11	8.2%	3.0%
église de Dieu prétendue réformée	8	6.0%	2.4%
église prétendue réformée	2	1.5%	0.6%
Total	126		
Denomination stipulation not clear	8	n/a	2.4%
Denomination stipulation not indicated	12	n/a	3.6%
Total number of contracts	338		
Contracts for Protestant clients	134		
Contracts for Catholic clients	198		
Confession Unidentified	6		
Total	338		

Source: ADV, 4 E 53: 38-90.

\*The total number of contracts with clear church stipulations for each denomination does not equal the total number of clients for each denomination because the denomination of the clients could be found through other sources, such as baptismal registers.

the 338 contracts of the Protestant notary Thomas Aubéry the Elder, as presented in Table 1. The surviving marriage contracts from his *étude* stretch from 1616 to 1668. A good part of his career thus unfolded over a time when the Reformed church in Loudun enjoyed a position of strength, especially during the first sub-period (1598-1635). Bold in his convictions, he put his signature to a document drafted by the Protestant *chefs de famille*, dated 1634. The document is largely a protest against Laubardemont's order forbidding Protestants from burying their

dead in the town cemetery.<sup>56</sup> This protest was a courageous move, given Laubardemont's dark and well-deserved reputation as a ruthless creature of the central government.<sup>57</sup> The daring of Aubéry the Elder may have been helped by the socio-professional status of his Protestant clients: in the marriage contracts that he drafted for them, the grooms display a higher representation in the categories of merchants and second-tier office-holders (38% and 13% respectively), compared to the percentages displayed in Figure 1; only one groom was involved in agricultural work of any sort.

Not surprisingly, Aubéry the Elder and his Protestant clients were much more audacious than other clients in their choice of words. As we see in Table 1, almost half of his contracts for Protestant clients use the term "église de Dieu réformée" (48.5%), the most flattering language for the Reformed faith. Again, the socio-professional status of the grooms in this data set is higher than what is found in Figure 1. There is also a relatively high concentration of merchants and second-level office-holders in this group (48% and 11% respectively). Likewise, the word "prétendue" appears only in a handful of his Protestant contracts, and one has the impression that the insertion of "de Dieu" in eight of those contracts (thus "église de Dieu prétendue réformée") represents an attempt to offset the negative adverb. For his Catholic contracts, he was not about to select any warm, maternal characteristics to typify the Catholic Church. There is a tone of condescension here, as 41% of his Catholic contracts omit the key word "apostolique."<sup>58</sup>

Comparing the wording of contracts made by this notary and those made by his successor reveals the fear that was creeping into the Reformed community. Aubéry the Elder and his Protestant clients lived mainly during the first two sub-periods of our study (1598-1635 and 1636-1665), when Loudun's Reformed community was still a formidable force that commanded respect. By contrast, Thomas Aubéry the Younger plied his trade in the three decades preceding the

56 AN, TT 250, pièce 49, "Acte portant pouvoir d'achepter un lieu pour faire un cimetière," January 15, 1634 (I am grateful to M. Jubert for having provided me with a copy of this document). See also Keith P. Luria, "Separated by Death? Burials, Cemeteries, and Confessional Boundaries in Seventeenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Spring 2001), p. 213.

57 By then, Laubardemont had become known for his cruelty, having applied his career skills in a number of highly questionable assignments for the royal government in southern France. Not known for his use of proper judicial procedure, Laubardemont is said to have coined the phrase, "give me two sentences of a man's hand-writing and I will make him hang." For details on this royal intendant, see Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, *Les châteaux de Loudun d'après les fouilles archéologiques de M. Joseph Moreau de la Ronde* (Loudun: Librairie Blanchard, 1915), pp. 445-448; Rapley, *A Case of Witchcraft*, p. 62.

58 For his Catholic clients, by contrast, in a few cases the missing word apparently was inserted afterwards, perhaps on the irate insistence of the clients involved. See ADV, 4 E 53:64, "Marriage contract: Urbain Bigot/Renée Neveu," December 13, 1643, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder. By contrast, neither two Catholic notaries, Aubin or René Douteau, characterized his faith in this way, a fact that is true particularly of the latter. In 24 of his contracts, Aubin Douteau uses the term "Our Holy Mother Church" alone ("que notre mère sainte églises'y accordera"), rather than stressing the apostolic, universal element of the Catholic faith. See, for example, ADV, 4 E 53:282, "Marriage contract: François Bourdillau/Françoise Criston," September 1, 1642, Minutier Aubin Douteau. Aubin Douteau, as we will see below, could show greater range in his choice of terms compared to his son René Douteau.

Revocation. Unquestionably, he remained a dedicated adherent of his creed, insisting for example on Protestant baptisms for his children right up to the Revocation.<sup>59</sup> But the younger Aubéry clearly laboured in dangerous times. In fact, he was forced to resign his office in 1682, probably to submit to an *arrêt* issued in June 1681 whereby every Protestant notary was given six months to abjure or relinquish his office. At the end of those six months, the remaining Huguenot notaries were compelled to resign.<sup>60</sup> His Protestant clients must have lived under the same shadow.

Through these 20 years, Aubéry the Younger and his Protestant clients chose less confessionally audacious words and obediently adhered to state legislation on the choice of terms. This circumspection is illustrated in Table 2. The compulsory word “*prétendue*” appears in most of the Protestant contracts (a total of 31% of his contracts for Protestant clients), a dramatic departure from his father’s tendency in this regard. Likewise, Aubéry the Younger did not dare to omit words to slight his confessional rivals. In all his contracts for Catholic clients the words “Catholic” and “apostolic” were used to indicate the Catholic Church.<sup>61</sup> The particular approach of this Protestant notary here suggests a begrudged acceptance of what he was required to do.

Yet a large number of the contracts shown in Table 2 either display ambiguity about the church clause or omit it entirely (41 contracts in total). Cross-referencing with other documents has revealed that most (31) of these contracts were for Protestant clients. These Protestant contracts were also drafted very close to the Revocation. This hesitancy about religious language and terms was not the result of an encroaching secularism in the documents, an echo of the thawing of this “age of saints.” We do not have here a glimmer of the early Enlightenment or eighteenth-century dechristianization and its propensity for removing religious references from secular documents, as has been found in Michel Vovelle’s famous study of provençal testaments.<sup>62</sup> Instead, the Protestant marriage contracts of Aubéry the Younger suggest fear and reticence about indicating in a legal document an allegiance to a minority denomination that faced a grim future. After all, if this absence of religious identification were the result of religious indifference, then these clients would have converted to Catholicism. In this later sub-period, from 1666 to 1685, it was in their best material interests to convert. A person who insisted on remaining Protestant in France in the 1680s could be described as an ardent member of that confession. The marriage contracts of another Protestant

59 For example, “Baptism of Pierre Aubéry,” December 1684 [no precise date given] in Transcriptions of Jacques Moron, *Baptêmes protestants de Loudun 1664-1685*.

60 Jean-Luc Tulot, “L’Église réformée de Loudun” (unpublished genealogical study), p. 74. See also A.-Théodore Van Deursen, *Professions et métiers interdits. Un aspect de l’histoire de la Révocation de l’Édit de Nantes* (Groninguic: J. B. Wolters, 1960), p. 224.

61 His Catholic contracts all have the church specified as “*église catholique apostolique et romaine*”; only two have the additional maternal qualifier (terms that Catholic notaries often used), perhaps on the clients’ insistence. The words “*notre mère et sainte*” were added between the lines, above the words “*église catholique apostolique et romaine*.” See ADV, 4 E 53:123, “Marriage contract: André Rousset/Catherine Lambert,” February 11, 1681, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger.

62 See, for example, Vovelle, *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence*, especially pp. 322-326.

Table 2: Stipulations of the Denomination in which the Marriage will be Celebrated (the Marriage Contracts of Thomas Aubéry the Younger, Protestant notary, 1662-1682)

Denomination	#	% of his total by clients' confession	% of his total # of contracts
<u>Catholic stipulation</u>			
<b>église catholique apostolique et romaine</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>90.4%</b>	<b>57.3%</b>
notre mère sainte église catholique apostolique et romaine	2	1.9%	1.2%
Total	96*		
<u>Protestant stipulation</u>			
église de Dieu réformée	4	6.9%	2.4%
église de Dieu	3	5.2%	1.8%
église de la religion réformée	1	1.7%	0.6%
église réformée	1	1.7%	0.6%
<b>église de Dieu prétendue réformée</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>
<b>église de la religion prétendue réformée</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17.2%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>
<b>église prétendue réformée</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12.1%</b>	<b>4.3%</b>
Total	27		
<b>Denomination stipulation not clear</b>	<b>26</b>	n/a	<b>15.9%</b>
<b>Denomination stipulation not indicated</b>	<b>15</b>	n/a	<b>9.1%</b>
Total number of contracts	164		
Contracts for Protestant clients	58		
Contracts for Catholic clients	104		
Confession unidentified	2		
Total	164		

Source: ADV, 4 E 53: 91-124.

\*The total number of contracts with clear church stipulations for each denomination does not equal the total number of clients for each denomination because the denomination of the clients could be found through other sources, such as baptismal registers.

notary, Jean Huger, exhibit this same timidity among both clients and notary, but also an insistence on remaining Protestant in the face of growing persecution.

### Burial Indications in the Testaments

A similar tendency towards secrecy and confessional reticence is found in the testaments passed for Protestant clients. Here we focus on the burial stipulations indicated in the Protestant testaments. Protestant testators of bold convictions

usually declared in the testament their wish to live and die in the Reformed confession. Consider the example of Jacquette Morin, wife of Pierre Roy sieur de Villepart. In her testament, drafted in 1634, she stated defiantly that she wished to be buried “in the cemetery of those of the religion of this town of Loudun with the solemnities of the Reformed Church which I have always upheld, by the grace of God.”<sup>63</sup> Of 56 testaments, half exhibit such preferences for the period from 1605 to 1665 (in the first two sub-periods).

This kind of statement has several underlying meanings. It is an especially defiant statement of faith in the teeth of growing Catholic pressure to convert. According to the fourth secret article of the Edict of Nantes, Catholic preachers had been expressly forbidden to extract deathbed conversions from dying Protestants, but successive pieces of legislation wore down this article’s potency. From the early 1660s onwards, a Catholic magistrate and a cleric could implore the ailing Huguenot to convert if they did so from a different room other than the testator’s bedroom.<sup>64</sup>

Certainly, for some Protestants, the thought of a deathbed conversion must have been highly unsettling, because it exacerbated their anxiety surrounding the issue of election. To convert during such a moment of truth, when one was so close to death and so vulnerable, would be to confirm a fear that one was not among the elect all along. Therefore, for the committed Protestant, it was imperative to state one’s desire to remain steadfast in the faith, to discourage any resourceful Catholic clerics, and to avoid stumbling at the end of the road.<sup>65</sup>

Taking this to a deeper level, the testament meant something quite different to those of the Reformed confession than to Catholics because, for Protestants, the connection between the living and the dead was severed completely after death. In the Catholic tradition, the deceased become what Natalie Zemon Davis has identified as a “fifth age group,” as the souls of the deceased receive the Catholic

63 ADV, 4 E 53:55, “Testament: Jacquette Morin,” November 5, 1634, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder. Morin and her husband must have converted in the following decade, given the Catholic baptisms of their four children: AML, GG 186, Baptismal registers of the parish St. Pierre du Martray, “Baptismal act of Pierre Roy,” March 13, 1640; “Baptismal act of Jeanne Roy,” September 13, 1641; “Baptismal act of Louis Roy,” August 9, 1643; “Baptismal act of Jacquette Roy,” February 3, 1645.

64 *L’Édit de Nantes*, secret article IV, pp. 61-62; “Arrêt du Conseil d’État qui ordonne que les sentences de provision pour les enfants convertis seront exécutées, et défend de prendre connaissance des conversions, le 24 mars 1661,” in Benoist, *Histoire de l’Édit de Nantes*, tome III, partie I, “Recueil d’édits, déclarations, arrêts, requêtes, mémoires et autres pièces authentiques, pour servir de preuve aux faits rapportez dans la troisième partie de l’Histoire de l’Édit de Nantes,” pp. 66-67; “Arrêt du Conseil d’État, pour la visite des malades de la RPR par les curés des lieux et autres ecclésiastiques, le 12 mai 1665,” in Benoist, *Histoire de l’Édit de Nantes*, tome III partie II, “Recueil d’édits...,” p. 10; Filleau, *Décisions catholiques*, décision 27, pp. 229-239.

65 See, for example, the testament of Renée Corbeau, widow of the *procureur* Étienne Fourreau. In it, she claims that she has always followed the Reformed religion (although she does not mention her conversion to Catholicism when she married Fourreau), and she expresses her wish to live and die in the said creed. See ADV, 4 E 53:399, “Testament: Renée Corbeau,” October 21, 1662, Minutier Jean Huger; AML, GG 14, Marriage registers of the parish St. Pierre du Marché, “Marriage act: Étienne Fourreau/Renée Corbeau,” February 17, 1641. For the definition of *procureur*, see footnote 28.



community's prayers as these souls made their way through Purgatory.<sup>66</sup> As Protestant belief denies the existence of Purgatory, Protestant testaments obviously contain no such requests or any desire to maintain a spiritual connection with the living. Where the soul ends up after death is not open to appeal or to the possibility of a painful but finite process of expiation. There is a finality to the judgment of the deceased, and the living can do nothing about it.<sup>67</sup> Death and a person's legacy still carried great weight for Loudun's Protestants, an imperative that echoed in the Protestant struggle to maintain a cemetery inside the town walls, as discussed above. However, the insistence in the testament on a Protestant burial, in a Protestant cemetery, was an important affirmation of the Protestant testator's convictions. Such an affirmation also served as an instructive example to living Protestants, to fortify them in their faith.

Yet, in the third sub-period, between 1666 and 1685, only 14 out of 36 testaments contain identifiably Protestant burial stipulations; 22 testaments were ambiguous about this matter, echoing the reticence in the Protestant marriage contracts.<sup>68</sup> As the wheels of the Revocation were set in motion in the 1660s, such affirmations of Reformed Protestant conviction became less prominent. The Protestants of Loudun had become much more cautious than their Catholic neighbours about advertising their confessional allegiance. This reticence is clear in the wills made with all of the Protestant notaries working in this third sub-period. In contrast, only 16 of the 192 Catholic testaments contain non-confessionalized burial clauses.

### Survival Strategies and the Transmission of Family Wealth

The strength of a Reformed community also manifests itself in family strategies relating to patrimony. This vitality is most evident in the marriage contracts. Arguably, the most critical element in a marriage contract resided in the provisions and description of the future bride's dowry. A bride's dowry was typically more extensive and higher in value than that of the groom, though this did not mean that grooms would not contribute to the future material sustenance of their families. The groom's "dowry" lay chiefly in his occupation or profession, his ability to generate income through his work. Women did not have the same access to work outside the domestic sphere, and, thus, much depended on their dowries. This partially explains why marriage contracts tended to encase the bride's dowry in protective clauses, especially if the dowry contained a great

66 Natalie Zemon Davis, "Ghosts, Kin, and Progeny: Some Features of Family Life in Early Modern France," *Daedalus*, vol. 106, no. 2 (special issue, April 1977), pp. 92-96. See also Philippe Ariès, *L'Homme devant la mort* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), pp. 152-180. For an example of one such testament from Loudun, see ADV, 4 E 53:276, "Testament: Catherine Thibault," October 26, 1630, Minutier Aubin Douteau.

67 See Églises réformées de France, "La Confession de foi des Églises réformées de France dite 'Confession de La Rochelle' (1559)," in Olivier Fatio, ed., *Confessions et catéchismes de la foi réformée* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1986), article 24, p. 122.

68 We were able to determine that these testaments were for Protestant testators through cross-referencing with other documents. For example, see ADV, 4 E 53:114, "Testament: Marie Grellé," November 9, 1676, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger.

deal of liquid capital and immovable property. Not only would that dowry need to sustain the future wife if her husband died before her, but the dowry was also important for the future household and for family strategies and alliance-building.<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately, comparing the dowries outlined in various marriage contracts is akin to comparing apples and oranges because the precise monetary value of property or possessions itemized in the dowry is not always given.<sup>70</sup> This prevents us from displaying dowry data on a graph.<sup>71</sup>

Yet these dowry details provide key information on how wealth was bequeathed from one generation to the next and how that transmission formed part of the mechanism by which Protestant families in Loudun were able to maintain family property. The impressive patrimony of these families, buttressed by a number of wealthy mercantile families,<sup>72</sup> armoured the confessional community to some degree. This base gave this community a kind of extended lease on life and material wealth, as Protestant office-holders were squeezed out of the legal professions and as the community in general lost its foothold in the two law courts. Undoubtedly, the dowries reveal the effects of growing religious persecution. Few venal offices formed a part of the wife's dowry, probably because it was becoming more difficult for Protestants to occupy such posts.<sup>73</sup> However, the dowries tell us more about how this confessional community was able to maintain a presence in the town right into the 1680s. They provide clues about the Reformed community's resilience.

First of all, these dowries formed part of the process by which the Protestant families of Loudun maintained family property and made it grow. We turn our attention to the first two sub-periods (from 1598 to 1635 and from 1636 to 1665).

69 De Ferrière, *La Science parfaite des notaires* (éd. 1686), pp. 80-85.

70 This is even true of a dowry that contains a house and a *métairie*. For example, see ADV, 4 E 53:123, "Marriage contract: Isaac Joubert/Marguerite Decerisiers," May 17, 1681, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger. A *métairie* is a form of land tenure by which the land is worked by one or more *métayers* but owned by someone else (roughly the equivalent of sharecropping). See Lachiver, *Dictionnaire du monde rural*, s.v. "métairie," p. 870.

71 One has the sense that the sets of marriage contracts in other studies are much more consistent, because the authors of those studies were able to show the dowry data on graphs. See, for example, Rome, *Les Bourgeois protestants de Montauban*, p. 114; Jahan, *Profession, parenté, identité sociale*, pp. 134-137. See also Mousnier, *La Stratification Sociale à Paris*, pp. 69-72; Audisio, "Se marier en Luberon," pp. 235-236; and, especially, Philip Benedict, "Faith, Fortune and Social Structure in Seventeenth-Century Montpellier," in Benedict, *The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots*, pp. 121-149.

72 The charts from my doctoral dissertation provide the socio-professional composition of Catholic and Protestant fathers for the first two sub-periods. In the first sub-period, of 751 Catholic fathers, only 11.6% were merchants; of 395 Protestant fathers, 19% were merchants. In the second sub-period, of 976 Catholic fathers, only 9% were merchants; of 292 Protestant fathers, 29.1% were merchants. See Bezzina, "After the Wars of Religion," pp. 132-138, 192-209.

73 Offices rarely appear in the whole data set of marriage contracts. However, there are four Protestant contracts that contain an office as part of either the future groom's dowry or that of the future bride (the office would be sold or passed on to the husband after the marriage ceremony). One of these contracts is dated 1654; the others are from the earlier decades. See, for example, ADV, 4 E 53:395, "Marriage contract: Pierre Angevin/Françoise Henebault," May 5, 1654, Minutier Jean Huger; and 4 E 53:40, "Marriage contract: Charles Audinet/Marie Thurault," September 30, 1619, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder.

Considering the available probate inventories, testaments, and estate settlements, we see a link between the access to inherited wealth and the ability of the couple in question to generate patrimony. Take, for example, the lawyer Samuel Motet and his wife Louise Aubin, who were married in 1635. Through the succession of Motet's parents, the newlyweds were able to purchase a house worth 2,000 *livres*, a significant piece of real estate for the time. Moreover, Louise came from the powerful and influential Aubin family network. The couple later could bestow upon their daughter Marguerite a dowry worth 6,000 *livres* (quite substantial for that local population and by comparison with other studies); through this contract, she entered the redoubtable Decerisiers/Dumoustier family network. Over the course of their marriage, Motet and Aubin purchased large tracts of property in the surrounding countryside, leaving to their heirs a very enviable inheritance indeed.<sup>74</sup>

For other Protestant couples, inherited wealth played a large role in the couple's ability to amass patrimony, and this inherited wealth was often channelled through marriage contracts. In 1613, for example, the merchant Jean Thibault and his wife, Judith Amonnet, received a share in the succession of Jean Amonnet. Two years later, they purchased a house and seigneurie worth 4,300 *livres*, quite exceptional for a mercantile family. Their patrimony then grew almost exponentially in the following years, incorporating more real estate, offices, and loan contracts. Their five surviving children each received an inheritance worth 4,000 *livres*.<sup>75</sup> Overall, these were strategic marriage alliances, perfectly suited for amassing and building family wealth. Such strategies were deployed among families of diverse socio-professional backgrounds.<sup>76</sup> All exhibit the same aggressive pursuit of property, offices, *rentes*, collectible debts, and money.

74 ADV, 4 E 53:86, "Post-mortem inventory of Samuel Motet," December 27, 1665, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder; 4 E 53:85, "Marriage contract: Jacques Decerisiers/Marguerite Motet," August 27, 1664, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder; 4 E 53:73, "*Don* by Charles Aubinsieur de Grand Champ and his wife Claude Aignan," June 7, 1652, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder. By this latter contract, the parents of Louise Aubin bestowed upon their son Charles the house and *métairie* of Nardannes, whose value was estimated to be 7,700 *livres*. Of this sum, Charles was obliged to pay 1,000 *livres* of his parents' debts. They gave him these properties to equalize his inheritance with that of his sister, and thus Louise's inheritance must have been worth at least 6,700 *livres*. On the question of determining family wealth and status from dowries, we should note that such an endeavour is fraught with challenges because it is difficult to compare dowry size in one locality with dowry size in another. However, to cite from another study (Mousnier's work on seventeenth-century Paris), a dowry worth 6,000 *livres* would fall into a fairly high socio-economic group, one that included medical doctors, lawyers in the *Parlement*, and prominent merchants (Mousnier, *La Stratification Sociale à Paris aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, p. 70). Marguerite Motet's dowry is still impressive when compared with the dowries of Nantais notaries for this period (a median of 2,000 *livres*). See Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy*, pp. 58-59.

75 ADV, 4 E 53:53, "Post-mortem inventory and *partage* of the inheritance of Jean Thibault merchant," June 3 and 12, 1632, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder; 4 E 53:55, "Marriage contract: Daniel Voyer/Catherine Thibault," June 7, 1634, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder; 4 E 53:54, "Marriage contract: Pierre Bourreau/Marguerite Thibault," March 24, 1633, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder.

76 See, for example, ADV, 4 E 53:82, "Post-mortem inventory of Mathieu Cornu *procureur*," August 11, 1661, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder; 4 E 53:83, "Marriage contract: Isaac Cornu/Marie Aubry," September 22, 1662, Minutier Jean Huger; 4 E 53:66, "Post-mortem inventory of René Minier *procureur*," November 10, 1645, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder; 4 E 53:67, "*Compromis* between Rachel Naudin and the heirs

The two decades preceding the Revocation witnessed a Reformed community that shrank in size and lost its hold on Loudun's judicial and tax-collecting institutions. Yet the dowry clauses in their marriage contracts continued to contain large amounts of real property and liquid capital. The role of the marriage contract as a chief conduit for generating and building family patrimony seems to have remained largely intact. Of the 72 Protestant marriage contracts for the third sub-period, 18 contain dowries for the groom that are higher than 1,000 *livres*, 22 for the bride. Take, for example, the two marriage contracts that the Protestant merchant Louis Amelot and his wife, Jeanne Allotte, arranged for their daughters in the 1670s. Those contracts rival those that the parents passed for their other two daughters in the 1660s.

Jeanne Amelot had brought to her marriage, arranged in 1671, a handsome dowry worth at least 6,000 *livres*, replete with two *métairies*, *rentes*, collectible debts, liquid capital, movable goods, and, of course, the bride's wedding clothes suitable to a woman of her position.<sup>77</sup> That certainly dwarfed many dowries for the daughters of Catholic merchants in the same period, most of whose dowries were under 500 *livres*.<sup>78</sup> To cite another example, the two daughters of the Reformed minister Jacques de Brissac each received sizeable dowries of between 4,000 and 5,000 *livres*, just a few years before the dragoons arrived in Loudun.<sup>79</sup> For each of their three daughters, the *procureur* Charles Rousseau and his wife, Jeanne Verdier, were able to provide dowries between 800 and 1,000 *livres*. Their contracts were passed in the late 1670s and early 1680s, and the dowries do not differ greatly in size or weight from those of the daughters of other *procureurs* in the first two sub-periods.<sup>80</sup>

One can detect in these Protestant dowries, too, a strong degree of resilience and defiance: they continued to contain real estate right up to the moment of the Revocation. Of 72 Protestant marriage contracts in the third sub-period (1666-1685), 25 Protestant dowries contain a piece of real estate in Loudun or in the surrounding countryside. For example, in 1681, Isaac Joubert and his future bride

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of René Minier (from his first marriage)," May 5, 1646, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder; 4 E 53:75, "Conte concerning the succession of the deceased Alexandre Minier," April 30, 1654, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder.

77 ADV, 4 E 53:103, "Marriage contract: Paul Aubry/Jeanne Amelot," March 19, 1671, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger.

78 For comparison, see ADV, 4 E 53:314, "Marriage contract: Jullien Guery/Marguerite Pellé," July 29, 1671, Minutier René Douteau. The one exception here is the dowry of the Catholic Anne Goutard, which includes collectible assets of 3,733 *livres* 12 *deniers* (ADV, 4 E 53:105, "Marriage contract: Louis Besnard/Anne Goutard," January 16, 1672, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger).

79 ADV, 4 E 53:122, "Marriage contract: Jacob Debie/Catherine De Brissac," January 30, 1679, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger; 4 E 53:123, "Marriage contract: Abraham Dupin/Madeleine De Brissac," November 23, 1680, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger.

80 ADV, 4 E 53:119, "Marriage contract: Isaac Lesuire/Marie Rousseau," April 29, 1679, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger; 4 E 55:57, "[Annulled] marriage contract: Claude Lambert/Marthe Rousseau," May 11, 1682, Minutier René Confex; 4 E 53:327, "Marriage contract: Claude Lambert and Marthe Rousseau," June 10, 1684, Minutier René Douteau; 4 E 53:328, "Marriage contract: Jacques Dugué/Judith Rousseau," January 9, 1685, Minutier René Douteau.

Marguerite Decerisiers were to inherit through Marguerite's dowry a house and *métairie* right in Loudun, on the rue de l'Humeau Ferrasseau, and the couple could still be seen boldly having their children baptized in the Reformed church as late as 1684.<sup>81</sup> Yet Loudun's remaining Protestants in the 1670s and 1680s must have been sadly aware of the escalating persecution, the reports of Protestant temples that already were being torn down across the kingdom, the many forced conversions, or the rumours of those who had fled.

These marriage contracts show that some Protestant families in Loudun continued to invest in real estate and bequeath it to subsequent generations despite the fact that real estate was far less flexible an asset than liquid capital, especially if one suddenly had to flee. Real estate anchored a person and a family to a particular spot. If the temple were to be levelled, then the remaining Protestants in the area would be forced either to convert or to resuscitate the practice of the clandestine Reformed communities of the sixteenth century, when the fledgling Reformed faith struggled desperately for its existence.<sup>82</sup>

Why would these families continue to invest in such cumbersome assets? Perhaps the will to own real estate was part of the same firm resolve that kept these Protestants in Loudun. Real estate in this context was an affirmation of presence; it proclaimed a refusal to retreat, a high degree of confessional defiance in the face of aggression and adversity. It resembles very much the example of those Protestant families who owned real estate near the temple and who dug in their heels against Catholic efforts to make them sell their property so that a Catholic hospital and its chapel could be built in the near vicinity. These Protestants could see through that ruse. In other localities across France, an argument was made that the singing of the psalms in a temple nearby interfered with religious services in a neighbouring Catholic edifice. As the Edict of Nantes demanded the full and unhindered exercise of the Catholic faith in France, such liturgical obstruction could be cited as grounds to have the temple in question razed. Realizing that these attempts to stimulate the sale of their real estate were part of a scheme to prompt the levelling of their Protestant temple, Loudun's Protestant families resisted and held on tightly to their property.<sup>83</sup>

Not every member of the Protestant community of Loudun was a monolith of confessional resolve who used real estate to cement a foothold in Loudun. Some were more cautious, perhaps preparing for the exodus that they knew

81 ADV, 4 E 53:123, "Marriage contract: Isaac Joubert/Marguerite Decerisiers," May 17, 1681, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger; "Baptismal act of Marguerite Joubert," June 1682, Baptismal act of Marguerite Joubert," July 1683, "Baptismal act of Isaac Joubert," September 1684 [no precise dates given] all in Transcriptions of Jacques Moron, *Baptêmes protestants de Loudun 1664-1685*.

82 Rothrock, *The Huguenots*, pp. 35-49; Donald R. Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 91-128; Boisson and Daussy, *Les Protestants dans la France moderne*, pp. 55-70.

83 *L'Édit de Nantes*, p. 34; Fillcau, *Décisions catholiques*, décision 28, pp. 241-248; Drouault, *Recherches sur les établissements hospitaliers du Loudunais*, pp. 75-82; Bezzina, "Charity and Confessional Difference in Seventeenth-Century France," pp. 16-21; Benoist, *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes*, tome III, pp. 371-372.

would come eventually. Jacques de Brissac and his wife, Marie Ribay, did give a house and *métairie* to their daughter Madeleine in 1680, but in 1681 the parents modified the dowry, converting the item into something more vague (“en deniers, effets ou héritages,” which could signify anything, even money).<sup>84</sup> Even the Protestant dowries that contain real estate seem on the whole to have drifted away from bequeathing property so prominently in Loudun’s centre. By contrast, the Catholic dowries for this last sub-period that comprise real estate contain a larger proportion of houses situated in Loudun (eight, in fact).<sup>85</sup> Likewise, when we look back at the Protestant contracts for the second sub-period (1636-1665), we find that houses (all or part) situated in Loudun appear in eleven contracts.<sup>86</sup> The future of Loudun’s Reformed community did not look so uncertain then.

The growing accent on family survival strategy can be found to some degree in the testaments. There are 240 bequests noted in the 93 Protestant testaments. These are outlined in Table 3: Protestant Testamentary Bequests (1605-1685).<sup>87</sup> What is most intriguing here is the consistency across the three sub-periods in the bequests to individuals, particularly spouses and other relatives. For example, there are 74 such bequests in the third sub-period. By contrast, across all three sub-periods, the bequests to the Reformed Church of Loudun are relatively small, only 25 in total.

The consistently strong accent on directing one’s charity towards family and friends, rather than the Reformed Church, should not be read as disenchantment with the Reformed belief system or an unwillingness to contribute to the Reformed movement. If these Protestant testators had been disillusioned, they would have converted to Catholicism. Possibly, these testators in the third sub-period acted out of an awareness of a disturbing practice undertaken by the *parlements* and the central government: to transfer to local Catholic charitable institutions the Protestant legacies that had been bequeathed to their respective consistories, with the original intent of aiding financially the poor of the Reformed faith, or the pastor, or an aspiring student. Right from the 1620s,

84 ADV, 4 E 53:121, “Marriage contract: Abraham Dupin/Madeleine De Brissac,” November 23, 1680, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger.

85 See, for example, ADV, 4 E 53:123, “Marriage contract: François Briant/Françoise Jeanneau,” February 16, 1681, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger.

86 See, for example, ADV, 4 E 53:401, “Marriage contract: François Caillon/Judith Planchais,” April 20, 1664, Minutier Jean Huger.

87 Percentages are not given for numbers where the total of the set is under 20. In statistical reasoning, percentages are only reliable when the total of a series of numbers is greater or equal to 20. This is due to the fact that a minor difference in a real number by 1 will not produce a movement in its percentage that is greater than 5%. For example, suppose that we applied percentages to the bequests under the heading “Reformed Church of Loudun” for the first sub-period. The total for this data set is the real number of 9. The percentages for “The poor” and “Pastor’s upkeep” would be respectively 78% and 11%. However, if we adjust the real number by 1 for the former to 6 and the latter to 2, the percentages would change to 67% and 22% respectively. In practice, then, the application of percentages here is misleading because small changes in real numbers would produce much larger changes in their corresponding percentages. See Jarausch, *Quantitative Methods for Historians*, p. 27.

Table 3: Protestant Testamentary Bequests, 1605-1685

type of bequest	1605-1685		1st sub-period 1605-1635		2nd sub-period 1636-1665		3rd sub-period 1666-1685	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<u>Reformed Church of Loudun</u>								
The poor	15	6.3%	7*		6		2	
Pastor's upkeep	7	2.9%	1		5		1	
Consistory	2	0.8%	1		1		0	
Education of a student	1	0.4%	0		0		1	
Total	25	10.4%	9		12		4	
<u>Individuals</u>								
Spouse	60	25.0%	5	9%	36	45%	19	26%
Other relative	80	33.3%	24	44%	19	24%	37	50%
Friend	32	13.3%	11	20%	12	15%	9	12%
Godchild	3	1.3%	0		1	1%	2	3%
Servant	32	13.3%	14	25%	11	14%	7	9%
Neighbour	2	0.8%	1	2%	1	1%		
Total	209	87.1%	55	26%**	80	38%	74	35%
<u>Professional Personnel</u>								
Artisanal personnel	2	0.8%	2		0		0	
Legal personnel	1	0.4%	0		0		1	
Medical personnel	2	0.8%	1		1		0	
Total	5	2.1%	3		1		1	
<u>Miscellaneous</u>								
The town of Loudun	1	0.4%	1		0		0	
Total number of bequests	240	100%	68	28%	93	39%	79	33%

Source: ADV, 4 E 53: 39, 48, 51, 54-5, 59, 65, 68, 70, 72-3, 77, 79, 82-3, 85, 87, 93-5, 97, 100-2, 106-8, 114, 117, 119, 122-3, 177, 264, 276, 280-1, 314, 318, 324-6, 395-6, 398-400, 402; 4 E 55: 53, 55; AN TT 250/II; Archives hospitalières de Loudun, Maison de Charité, carton C.

\*Percentages are not given for numbers where the total for the set is under 20; see footnote 87.

\*\*The percentages on this total line relate to the figure 209.

the *parlements* of Paris and Bordeaux had been passing legislation confiscating such bequests. Here, the judges manipulated the 22<sup>nd</sup> general article of the Edict of Nantes, which stipulated that hospitals in the kingdom could not discriminate between the two confessions when distributing charity or medical help; thus the consistories and Protestant testators could not legally allocate funds

uniquely to Protestant institutions.<sup>88</sup> The realization that Loudun's *bailliage* fell under the jurisdiction of the *parlement* of Paris made the fear even more acute. The accent on family solidarity in the testamentary statistics in Table 3 can be interpreted as part of an overall strategy of retrenchment, buttressing the family patrimony and ensuring that surviving family members would be well cared for in the face of a future that looked uncertain. By contrast, in the Catholic testaments, bequests to Catholic religious institutions and personnel remain consistently high in number, representing in the third period 43% of all bequests given.

### Witnesses, Marriage Contracts, and Family Solidarity

Families of this confessional minority who worried about their future and suffered overt hostility sought solace and refuge in ceremonies and practices that enhanced family solidarity. One such occasion was the drafting of a marriage contract. Here, the high number of signatures on many of these contracts suggests that the document represented more than a legal transaction between two families. Some of the Protestant contracts have as many as 75 signatures, far beyond what was required by state law to validate the contract: the signatures of the parties involved, namely the bride and groom, the surviving parents (not required if the bride and groom had reached the age of majority), the notary, and two additional witnesses, who were usually the notary's clerks.<sup>89</sup> That so many friends and relatives attended the preparation of the contract, often in the home of the future bride, demonstrates how the marriage contract strengthened these family ties. Much larger numbers of witnesses were present at the signing of Protestant marriage contracts compared to Catholic contracts, even considering the changes in each confessional community.

The word "witness" here is not meant in the strict sense of a legal witness to the marriage contract. Rather, it refers to someone who attended the drafting of the contract and indicated his or her attendance in some way. The total number of witnesses for each contract include those who attended and signed or were present and made a *déclaration de ne savoir signer*, which was recorded along with their name by the notary.<sup>90</sup> As simple averages hide vast variations, the following analysis looks at grouped frequency distributions of the number of witnesses to

88 This interpretation of general article 22 negated the Edict's secret article 42, which categorically recognizes the validity of Protestant bequests left to the consistories. However, since the general articles were registered by the *Parlement* of Paris, and the secret articles were not, the former were always thought to be more authoritative. See Jean Fillcau, *Décisions catholiques*, décision 79, pp. 586-589; William J. Pugh, "Catholics, Protestants and Testamentary Charity in Seventeenth-Century Lyon and Nîmes," *French Historical Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4 (Autumn 1980), pp. 493-494; *L'Édit de Nantes*, general article 22, p. 40; secret article 42, p. 68.

89 De Ferrière, *La Science Parfaite des notaires* (éd. 1686), p. 28; *Ordonnances du Roi Henri III...sur les plaintes et doléances faites par les Députés des États de son Royaume, convoquées et assemblées en la ville de Blois* (Paris: Leboucher, 1788), tome XIV, articles 165 and 166, pp. 216-218; Scarlett Beauvalet et Vincent Gourdon, "Les Liens sociaux à Paris au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: une analyse des contrats de mariage de 1660, 1665 et 1670," *Histoire, Économie, et Société*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1998), pp. 584-585.

90 We also removed from the data sets the signatures of the notary and those who worked for him either as assistants or apprentices (*clercs, praticiens, postulants*).



reveal the nuances and the colour in the material.<sup>91</sup> We have arranged the following template for our grouped frequency distributions:

- 0 to 5 witnesses;<sup>92</sup>
- 6 to 10 witnesses;
- 11 to 20 witnesses;
- 21 to 30 witnesses;
- more than 30 witnesses.

In the following discussion I contrast the witness data in Protestant and Catholic marriage contracts. Usually these ceremonies were attended by people of the same faith. Some Loudun families (or, more precisely, family names) never appear in the documents of the opposite confession. The Amonnet fall into this category. However, some of these contracts have confessionally heterogeneous sets of witnesses, and here we see instances of confessional intermingling. We can determine the confession of at least some of the witnesses because the notary indicated the genealogical link between the witness and the parties in question; cross-referencing with other documents takes us to their confession.<sup>93</sup> The marriage contracts for many Catholic domestic servants included large numbers of identifiably Protestant signatories. These signatories were all related to the Protestant head of that particular household. Take, for example, the marriage contract of the Catholic servant Gabrielle Coustan, which was drafted in the house of her master, the Protestant Jean Renaudot. She hailed from the village of Laire; like many domestic servants, she lacked influence and an extensive family network in Loudun, and her dowry was meagre. Still, her marriage contract displays the signatures of Renaudot's wife as well as eight other of his relatives, suggesting that they had become a kind of surrogate family for Coustan.<sup>94</sup>

91 Hudson, *History by Numbers*, pp. 60-67; Haskins and Jeffrey, *Understanding Quantitative History*, pp. 18-19, 45-47, 49-51; Jarausch, *Quantitative Methods for Historians*, pp. 82-85.

92 Of course, a marriage contract might not have the signatures or *déclarations de ne savoir signer* from the parents of both the bride and groom. Many of those parents were deceased or lived in other towns and could not attend the marriage contract ceremony. That is why the number of witnesses in a given contract can be so low. The numbers analysed below represent only the witnesses at the initial preparation and signing of the marriage contract. In the contracts themselves, after the lists of signatures, one finds what one could call "epilogues," containing for example the acknowledgement for the receipt of the dowry, which could take place months after the celebration of the marriage. These were strictly legal transactions and not occasions for gathering family and friends, and, thus, the signatures for these additions were not included in the data sets discussed below.

93 In a collection of 443 marriage contracts taken from the period 1598 to 1665, 150 contracts (33%) contain witnesses of a confession that is opposite to that of the parties (Bezzina, "After the Wars of Religion," pp. 383-395). However, the cross-referencing technique cannot be applied to the vast bulk of the signatories in our data sets, a fact that seems to depart from at least one other study. See Beauvalet and Gourdon, "Les Liens sociaux à Paris au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," pp. 596-601.

94 ADV, 4 E 53:100, "Marriage contract: Michel Challon/Gabrielle Coustan," 1669 [day and month not indicated], Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger. On the vulnerable status of domestic servants, see Cissie Fairchild, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 61-66.

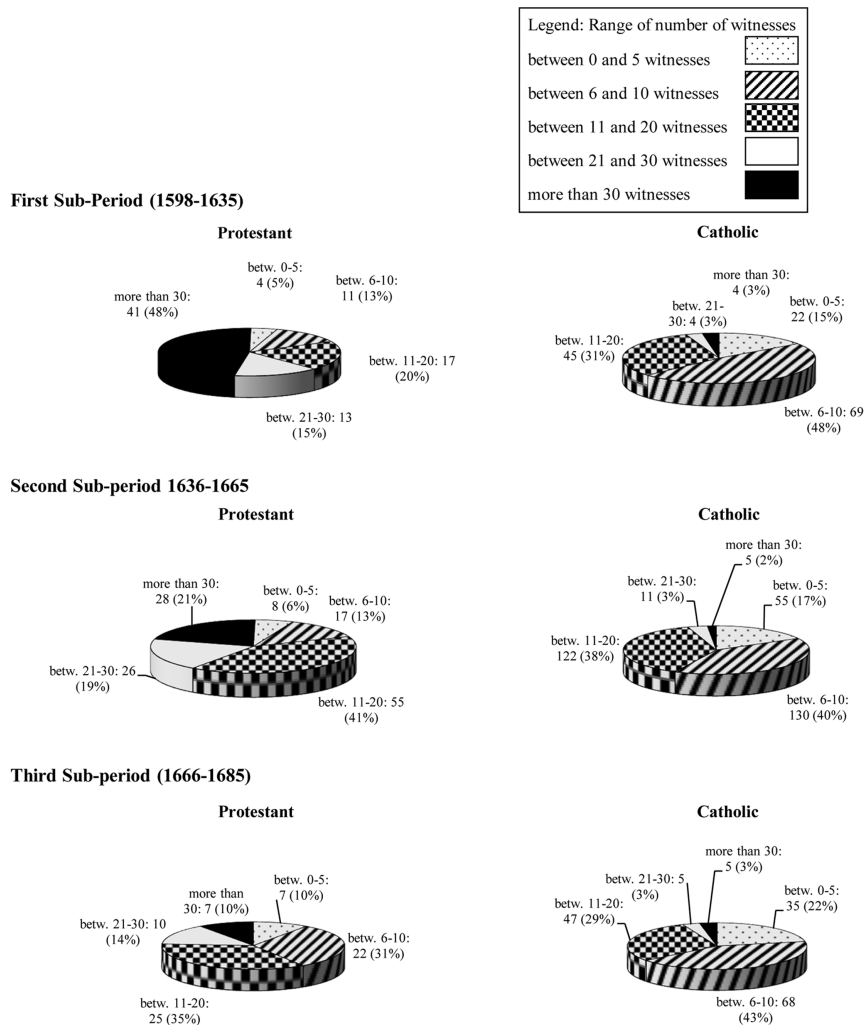


Figure 2: Number of Witnesses in Marriage Contracts (Grouped Frequency Distribution).

Total number of contracts: 918.

For each unit, the number of contracts and their percentage are given.

Source: ADV, 4 E 1: 92, 260-2, 264-71; 4 E 53: 37-125, 175-8, 260-282, 304-328, 394-405; 4 E 55: 43-58.

Figure 2 depicts the witness data across the three sub-periods.<sup>95</sup> It demonstrates some changes in the Protestant community, but overall the data reveal consistently higher numbers of witnesses in the Protestant contracts. In the first

<sup>95</sup> These figures include the marriage contracts for, on the one hand, first marriages and, on the other, marriages *en secondes nocces* or higher. I did statistical comparisons between the two types and found that the numbers of witnesses in both do not differ dramatically. That is, the contracts for second marriages do not have a noticeable tendency to have fewer witnesses and signatories. This is contrary to what is found in another

sub-period, the available Protestant marriage contracts show that 41 (48%) were attended by more than 30 witnesses; the number of contracts in the 0-5 category is quite small. The Catholic data exhibits an inverted image, with the bulk of the contracts (48%) falling in the category of 6 to 10 witnesses, and only 3% of Catholic contracts have more than 30 witnesses. In the second sub-period, the contrasts between Protestant and Catholic marriage contracts become less pronounced: on the Protestant side the highest category of more than 30 witnesses loses its pre-eminence, dropping to 21%, while the Catholic numbers remain roughly similar to their confessional antecedents in the first sub-period. One intriguing contract exhibits very few signatures probably because it was drafted in prison, where the future groom was retained at the request of his future bride (perhaps as a result of court action following a possible *déclaration de grossesse* made by the bride).<sup>96</sup>

Overall, those Catholic percentages do not change dramatically in the third sub-period (1666-1685). Indeed, the most frequent number of witnesses at Catholic contract-signing ceremonies remained in the category of 6 to 10 across the period. In contrast, the Protestant families manifest a continued movement away from marriage contract ceremonies attended by large numbers of people. This surely reflects the growing problems in the Reformed community in the two decades prior to the Revocation. The demise, in the third sub-period, of ceremonies with more than 30 witnesses can probably be linked to the demographic decline of that community as the Revocation approached. As the Protestant family networks lost members to the opposite confessional camp or to emigration abroad, so too must the number of attendees at marriage contract ceremonies have shrunk as a result. Yet, even taking into consideration these changes over time, Loudun's Protestant families tended to have larger gatherings at their marriage contract ceremonies than did their Catholic counterparts. This is apparent in the category of more than 30 witnesses, but also in the next category of between 21 and 30 witnesses. For example, in the third sub-period, the Catholic contracts in this category lie at the low percentage of 3%.

We cannot ascertain much about the tenor of that ceremony (perhaps for some families it approached the unedifying scene portrayed in Hogarth's *Marriage à la mode*, whose first painting humorously depicts the signing of a contract, with few witnesses, between the misaligned families of the rich aspiring merchant and the penniless nobleman).<sup>97</sup> But, one can imagine the social difference between

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study, where it is argued that contracts for remarriages tended to have fewer witnesses because of the slight discomfiture and ambiguity surrounding remarriage in Early Modern Europe. See Beauvalet and Gourdon, "Les Liens sociaux à Paris au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," especially pp. 590-591.

96 A *déclaration de grossesse* was a formal complaint to the civil or religious authorities made by a woman against a man, in some cases after he had promised to marry her, then initiated sexual relations that resulted in her pregnancy, but then afterwards abandoned his promise. In this particular case, Anthoine Robert's incarceration may have been the result of his refusal to honour his marriage promise. See ADV, 4 E 53:308, "Marriage contract: Anthoine Robert/Catherine Francher," February 28, 1665, Minutier René Douteau; Sara F. Matthews Grieco, "The Body, Appearance, and Sexuality," in Zemon Davis and Farge, eds., *A History of Women in the West*, vol. III: *Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, pp. 79-81; De Ferrière, *La Science parfaite des notaires* (éd. 1686), p. 117.

97 See David Bindman, *Hogarth* (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 111.

a ceremony attended by more than 30 people, and one with only five. These Catholic-Protestant differences in signatory patterns cannot be ascribed to notarial idiosyncrasy.<sup>98</sup> Loudun's Protestants may well have been taking advantage of the potential of such a ceremony to instil cohesiveness in the larger family network, despite the confessional tensions and the persecution escalating around them.

The use of the marriage contract ceremony as a means to galvanize Protestant family solidarity is supported when one considers the place in which the contract was drafted. There seems to be a link between the site of the contract's preparation and the number of attendees. Contracts with large numbers of witnesses tended to be drafted in the home of the family of the bride or groom, or that of a relative. For example, of the 76 Protestant contracts in the category "more than 30 witnesses," 60 were passed in the house of a family member. The choice of such a locale suggests that the preparation and signing of the marriage contract took the form of a family ceremony.<sup>99</sup> This may also have been a question of logistics: could one comfortably fit 75 witnesses inside a notary's study? Those contracts passed at the notary's residence tended to be more business transactions, as opposed to family ceremonies.

The evidence for large numbers of witnesses among the town's Protestants also fits the pattern of that community's socio-professional configuration. Contracts with large numbers of witnesses tended to be made by the socio-professional elites in the Reformed community. In an extensive article on Parisian marriage contracts, Scarlett Beauvalet and Vincent Gourdon argue that grouped frequency distributions for witness data tended to reflect socio-professional standing, with the contracts for social elites such as noble families tending to have very high numbers of signatures, whereas those for families of lower social status did not. In that sense, the number of witnesses stood as a form of representation of oneself and one's family, explicit indicators of status and the desire for upward social mobility.<sup>100</sup>

Table 4 shows the Protestant witness data subdivided according to the socio-professional status of the groom. The category "more than 30 witnesses" is dominated by level-two office-holders, merchants, and men of the *sieur de* category. Clearly, these elite families could host large gatherings. Plausibly, the Protestant merchant and office-holding families had much wider family and social networks in Loudun itself than Protestant artisans did. Marriage contracts involving

98 We divided the data in the frequency distribution groups according to notary. Although Thomas Aubéry the Elder and Jean Huger, two Protestant notaries, led the pack in terms of the large number of signatures in their marriage contracts, the overall differences between those two notaries and the others are not stark. For example, 13% of Jean Huger's marriage contracts fell into the "more than 30 witnesses" category, compared to 6% of those of René Douteau, a Catholic notary operating in roughly the same period.

99 For an example of a marriage contract with many attendees that was passed in the home of the bride's parents, see ADV, 4 E 53:53, "Marriage contract: Jacques Dufresnay/Marie Alexandre," February 28, 1632, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder. For an example of a marriage contract passed in a notary's study, see ADV, 4 E 53:314, "Marriage contract: Jehan Carré/Susanne Gastinet," July 10, 1671, Minutier René Douteau.

100 Beauvalet and Gourdon, "Les Liens sociaux à Paris au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," pp. 593-596. See also Jochen Hoock et Nicolas Jullien, "Dots normands (mi-XVII<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)," *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, vol. 7 (1998), p. 5.

Table 4: Witness Data: Distribution by the Socio-Professional Category of the Groom Grouped Frequency Distributions Protestant marriage contracts

socio-professional category of the groom	row totals	numbers of witnesses in each contract									
		betw. 0 and 5		betw. 6 and 10		betw. 11 and 20		betw. 21 and 30		more than 30	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
office-holders: level two	26	0		8	31%	2	8%	3	12%	13	50%
office-holders: level three	11	0		2		3		1	0%	5	
office-holders: level four	19	3*		2		9		3	16%	2	
doctors/principals	8	2		2		1		3	0%	0	
apothecaries/barber-surgeons	6	0		0		3		2	0%	1	
“sieur de”	48	3	6%	6	13%	17	35%	7	15%	15	31%
merchants	92	4	4%	13	14%	33	36%	17	18%	25	27%
artisans	42	4	10%	12	29%	14	33%	5	12%	7	17%
land-owning farmers	1	1		0		0		0		0	
other agricultural workers	1	0		0		1		0		0	
soldiers	1	0		0		1		0		0	
servants	2	0		0		2		0		0	
Total contracts	257	17	7%**	45	18%	86	33%	41	16%	68	26%
undetermined	35	2	6%	5	14%	11	31%	8	23%	9	26%

Source: ADV. 4 E 1: 262, 264, 265, 268; 4 E 53: 38-42, 44-45, 47-56, 58-64, 66-73, 75-79, 81-88, 92-94, 96-97, 99-101, 103-107, 109-123; 176, 178, 261, 263, 268, 270-272, 278, 282, 307, 312, 314, 325, 327-328, 394-398, 400-404 ; 4 E 55: 46, 49-50, 53, 57; E 2 352; E n 1489; J 1003.

\*Percentages are not given for numbers where the total for the set is under 20; see footnote 87.

\*\*The percentages for the Total contracts row relate to the total 257 and not for the total for the column in question.

artisans, be they Protestant or Catholic, often involved a bride or groom from another town or a village in the countryside, in which case such newcomers to Loudun were unlikely to have brought a large train of relatives and friends to attend the signing of the marriage contract.<sup>101</sup> Such social realities could affect the number of witnesses in these contracts.

The larger number of witnesses at Protestant ceremonies would appear to reflect the significance of family ties to Protestants, an observation that is further supported when we examine who the witnesses were. Thirty-nine contracts included the signature of a Reformed minister or pastor.<sup>102</sup> Catholic priests, in contrast, did not participate in such ceremonies to the same degree. Judging by the similarity in family names among the parties and the witnesses, it seems reasonable to conclude that most of the other guests were relatives of some sort. Among Protestants, these contract signing ceremonies appear to have been family occasions to which relatives, to a lesser extent friends, and sometimes Protestant clergy were invited.

The greater number of Protestant witnesses in these marriage contracts can be linked to an accent on family solidarity, and that accent can be linked to the changing parameters for religious expression. Religion has a life that happens outside the physical structure of the church. The Catholic community in Loudun, as elsewhere in France, could practise and proclaim its faith together and in public through a number of conduits: attending and even participating in religious processions, partaking in public ceremonies involving confraternities, listening to an open-air sermon by one of the Capuchin or Jesuit fathers. The Protestant public expression of faith had once taken the form of funerary processions, public sermons, and the singing of psalms. However, all of that had become impossible by the third sub-period.<sup>103</sup> Religious expression for France's Protestant minority thus became more private. It could very well be that Loudun's Protestants saw in the preparation of the marriage contract a family ceremony that could take the place of these circumscribed activities. It served not only to enhance family solidarity but also to remind all those present of their continued allegiance to the church of the Elect. The preparation of these contracts took place within the private sphere, and so ran less risk of attracting Catholic hostility or opprobrium. These marriage contract ceremonies helped provide an expression for Protestant confessional life when other mediums had become restrained, restricted, or simply too risky.

Another concomitant explanation for the differences in the Catholic and Protestant witness data lies in the influence of geography, specifically geographic mobility and the rate of in-migration into Loudun from the surrounding countryside.

101 This factor of geography and in-migration to Loudun is discussed below.

102 See, for example, ADV, 4 E 53:94, "Marriage contract: Jacques Dumoustier/Catherine Gohier," January 18, 1665, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Younger.

103 Bernard Roussel, "'Ensevelir honnestement les corps': Funeral Corteges and Huguenot Culture," in Raymond A. Mentzer and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Society and Culture in the Huguenot World 1559-1685* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 193-208, especially pp. 206-207; Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 506-508; Benoist, *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes*, tome III, p. 529; Filleau, *Décisions catholiques*, décision 37, pp. 299-313.

Like so many other early modern towns, Loudun depended on the villages in the nearby hinterlands to replenish its numbers, especially after a demographic catastrophe such as the plagues of the late 1620s and early 1630s.<sup>104</sup> This becomes pertinent when we examine across the three sub-periods the available data in the marriage contracts for the geographic origins of the Catholic families of the bride and groom: we see that in many cases one of the future newlyweds came from a community outside the town. They did so at a greater rate than their Protestant counterparts, showing the impact of “confessional Malthusianism” discussed above. As new residents of Loudun, these Catholic immigrants could not have belonged to extensive family networks that could attend the ceremony. Out of 250 Protestant grooms and 247 Protestant brides for whom the place of residence is cited in the contract, 58 (23%) of the grooms and 18 (7%) of the brides came from elsewhere. By comparison, the Catholic figures are higher: 32% of the grooms and 11% of the brides came from elsewhere. That difference appears more sharply when we examine the geographic origin of the parents: for example, of the parents of the Protestant grooms, only 18% came from other localities; by contrast, 62% of the parents of the Catholic grooms came from elsewhere. Part of the reason for these anomalies is that many of the future Catholic newlyweds were servants (169 in fact), who came from a rural village to the town to work. Tellingly, for 27 of those servants, the servant’s residence is listed as Loudun, but the parents came from somewhere else. Here, as in so many other cases, their children were plausibly refugees from a rural catastrophe seeking sustenance in an urban community like Loudun, reflecting the harsh realities of rural life so poignantly visible in the paintings by the Le Nain brothers. Economic hardship triggered internal migration in France.<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, when we cross the parents’ names in the marriage contracts with the parents’ names in the baptismal registers, we find that a far higher percentage of the Protestant sets of parents appear in the Protestant baptismal registers, almost double the comparative Catholic percentages (and there is a thirteen-year gap in those Protestant registers). Essentially, the Protestant marriage market in Loudun did not have the geographic range of the Catholic population; prospective Protestant brides or grooms were limited largely to Loudun. The

104 On this truism about Early Modern French towns and the rural world in general, see Philip Benedict, “French Cities from the Sixteenth Century to the Revolution: An Overview,” *Cities and Social Change in Early Modern France*, ed. Benedict (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 14; Chartier et al., *La ville des temps modernes*, p. 52; Jacques Dupâquier, *Histoire de la population française* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995), tome II, pp. 114-120; James B. Collins, “Geographic and Social Mobility in Early Modern France,” *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1991), pp. 563-577; Wheaton, “Affinity and Descent in Seventeenth-Century Bordeaux,” p. 116; Isabelle Robin-Romero et Giulio Romero Passerin d’Entreves, “Les maris, les femmes, les parents. Les contrats de mariage parisiens au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Histoire, Économie, et Société* 17, no. 4 (1998), pp. 618-619. On the plagues that struck Loudun, see Pierre Pierre Delaroche, *Une épidémie de peste à Loudun en 1632* (Bordeaux: Imprimerie-Librairie Delmas, 1936), p. 40, 66-69; “Regulations for the town of Loudun concerning the plague of 1632,” 8 May 1632, AML, BB30, 2<sup>e</sup> pièce; Drouault, *Recherches sur les établissements hospitaliers du Loudunais*, pp. 50-52.

105 See Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 31-41; Anthony Blunt, *Art and Architecture in France 1500-1700* (London: Penguin, 1982), pp. 265-271.

families in the Protestant contracts were, in most cases, from Loudun; their family networks resided in the town; family, friends, and relatives thus were more able to attend the marriage contract's composition. In essence, Malthusian realities did contribute to the decline of the Protestant population in Loudun, because this community could not draw upon a reservoir of confessional brethren in the surrounding countryside as the Catholic community could. However, this same demographic reality gave that beleaguered minority a degree of cohesiveness, density, and solidity. Loudun's Protestant families may have subsisted in an increasingly insular and restricted environment, but that paradoxically enabled them to develop extensive, resilient family networks.

### Conclusion

Much of the material discussed here presents the picture of a Reformed community that diminished in number as the Revocation approached. However, this confessional community held on to the end, and, in that sense, Loudun seems to have had more in common with the Huguenot strongholds in southern France than some of the more beleaguered minorities in the central-western part of the kingdom. Loudun's Protestant community was something of a geographic anomaly. It had set deep roots during the chaos and upheaval of the sixteenth century, and those roots endured through the period of the Edict of Nantes.

That resilience and persistence were strengthened to some degree by the socio-professional composition of Loudun's Reformed community. The Protestants of Loudun had carved out a formidable presence in the mercantile and legal professions. They were able to accumulate and maintain wealth and property and refine their family networks and alliances through such ceremonies as the preparation and signing of a marriage contract. Such material confidence could explain the bold terminology that they often incorporated in their marriage contracts, as we have seen. Perhaps, then, the ability of a minority community to withstand persecution lay not just in its legal title, or the longevity of its existence, or even simply the confessional convictions of its members (which often lacked uniformity), but in the socio-professional status of the families themselves.

Such resilience could at times defy and circumvent what was codified and demanded in law. The seminal historian of French Protestantism, Elisabeth Labrousse, once commented that studying state legislation at the national level does not always provide an accurate and fully nuanced picture of what happened in reality. The state may have passed legislation restricting the Protestant minority, but such legislation was not always followed to the letter.<sup>106</sup> There were too many aspects of life that could not be regulated, even clever ways to pass under the radar, and the state did not possess the resources to enforce its legislation completely. Protestant notaries and clients in Loudun avoided the ignominious adverb "prétendue" as long as they could, for example. This divergence between

106 Labrousse, "*Une foi, une loi, un roi?*", pp. 136-140.



law and practice does not undermine the objective reality of growing persecution, but it does add some qualification and local detail.

It would be wrong to conclude that Loudun was characterized entirely by two polarized communities glaring at each other across the confessional divide. These marriage contracts show evidence of some cross-confessional activity: an empathetic Catholic notary in the earlier period who referred to the Reformed Church as the “*église de Dieu réformée*,” for example, or numerous examples of extended Protestant families attending the drafting of the marriage contract of their Catholic servants.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, not every Protestant was an iceberg of confessional conviction. The variations in the Protestant testaments exemplify this fact. Also, if the occasional Protestant groom came from the Catholic countryside, one might wonder what he had been doing there (perhaps socio-professional or economic concerns spoke more loudly in his ear than the need to be close to a Reformed temple).<sup>108</sup>

Although important to note, these examples of the middle ground between Protestant and Catholic do not negate the dominant image of the tenuous existence of a religious minority living in a predominantly hostile kingdom. The evidence presented here indicates that this particular climate of religious persecution produced subtle changes in the lives of the families who belonged to this minority. Only local studies like this one can shed light on how individuals responded to the growing level of discrimination. At the same time, that climate triggered survival strategies and emboldened those who chose to remain a part of the minority. Perhaps these historical realities were true for Protestants not only in Loudun but also in France in general, as well as for Catholic minorities in Protestant states across Europe.<sup>109</sup> Early Modern Europe had not yet arrived at the point when religious pluralism could be accepted, tolerated, or even believed to be inherently good. Loudun’s Protestant minority shrank through the period of the Edict of Nantes; the community shelved much of the confessional exuberance and boldness that earlier conditions had allowed. As these notarial documents reveal, however, in some ways the Protestants of Loudun retained the necessary tools to ensure their survival as the Revocation approached and perhaps into the period beyond.

107 ADV, 4 E 53:278, “Marriage contract: Jacques Vandangeon/Ester Lambert,” January 18, 1634, Minutier Aubin Douteau; 4 E 53:79, “Marriage contract: Hilaire Gaudin/Renée Thibault,” March 18, 1658, Minutier Thomas Aubéry the Elder.

108 The parents of Daniel Dupin had been married in Loudun, and they baptized at least three of their children in Loudun’s Reformed Church. Yet, in Daniel Dupin’s marriage contract, he cited as his domicile the village of Bourelière, which is located in the Poitou province, but not close to any Protestant community. See AML, GG 195, Table of Protestant marriages, 1608-1644, “Marriage act: Daniel Dupin/Madeleine Roy,” 1630 [no precise date given]; “Baptismal act of Pierre Dupin,” September 1631, “Baptismal act of Louise Dupin,” February 1642, and “Baptismal act of Samuel Dupin,” January 1643 [no precise dates given], Transcriptions of Jacques Moron, *Baptêmes protestants de Loudun 1621-1663*; ADV, 4 E 53:403, “Marriage contract: Daniel Dupin/Judith Guérin,” October 13, 1666, Minutier Jean Huger.

109 See, for example, Katy Gbbons, “‘A Reserved Place’? English Catholic Exiles and Contested Space in Late-Sixteenth-Century Paris,” *French Historical Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Winter, 2009), pp. 33-62, especially pp. 39-40; Stefania Tutino, *Law and Conscience: Catholicism in Early Modern England 1570-1625* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), especially pp. 1-9.